

The Struggle Tells Me I Don't Belong, Yet I Will Stand Up and Show Up: A Psychosociocultural Exploration of How Latino/x Male Undergraduates' Name, Process, and Manifest Their Identities

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Latino/x undergraduate males continue to face unique challenges in higher education that call for greater exploration. This qualitative study explored how Latino/x males name, process, and manifest their salient identities. Using a psychosociocultural approach (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000), we interviewed 10 self-identified Latino/x undergraduate males at a predominantly White university located in the midwestern United States yielding four metathemes per a multistep content analysis. Based on students' narratives, four metathemes (i.e., Naming What I Know, Awareness, Action, and Deepening the Narrative: Pick a Struggle) emerged and provided greater understanding of Latino/x males' educational struggles and identity strengths.

Public Significance Statement

Latino/x males navigate and negotiate their social identities as part of their educational experience within higher education. For greater understanding of these experiences, the present study explores how 10 Latino male undergraduates held knowledge about, were aware of, and took action for their communities on- and off-campus. Our findings direct student service personnel to prioritize the strength-based processes within the educational struggles of Latino/x male students as they honor and uphold their cultural values in service of themselves, their families, and future generations of students.

Keywords: Latino/x undergraduate males, identity, campus climate, sense of belonging

Latinx communities are a prominent and growing population in postsecondary education (Pew Research Center, 2022). Over the past 2 decades, the number of Latinx students with at least an associate degree increased by approximately 16% (Postsecondary National Policy Institute [PNPI], 2021). Despite Latinx increased representation in higher education, their enrollment rates continue to lag behind their White peers (PNPI, 2021), with the health pandemic producing an increased systemic decline in enrollment (Pew Research Center, 2022). Literature on students' educational experiences frequently describes these disparities as social justice issues (e.g., prison pipeline), yet it rarely centers on students' cultural strengths and navigational abilities to thrive regardless of their educational experiences. Identity-focused (e.g., gender, ethnicity, and generational status) research is needed to understand these differences. We take a whole student approach by seeking to understand Latino males' self-beliefs and perceptions, social connections and relationships, and cultural beliefs and processes within the university setting

(i.e., psychosociocultural [PSC]; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000), and how they manifest their identities within their educational experiences.

Latino/x males' frequently report overt (i.e., being perceived as a university worker vs. a student on campus; Gloria et al., 2017) and covert encounters of racism fraught with challenges, such as experiences of being "pushed out" (Cerezo et al., 2013). Students' educational struggles are exacerbated at different intersections (i.e., race, gender, and college generation) and academic contexts (e.g., intellectual, emotional, and geographical; Vasquez et al., 2020). Students seek their family values for guidance and support, in particular, their mothers (Ballysingh, 2021; Castellanos et al., 2020; Sáenz et al., 2020). As Latino/x males are often the first in their families to attend college (Excelencia in Education, 2019), relying on individual and group structures of support (e.g., student organizations) remains a critical process (Dueñas & Gloria, 2022). Yet, in finding their student enclaves, many experience *own group conformity* (Contrada et al., 2001) in which they feel pressured to fulfill ethnic-specific behaviors, such as peer conformity to work and earn a full-time wage and provide for their family. Ingrained from an early age (Sáenz et al., 2015), gender socialization (messages about masculinity; Hurtado & Sinha, 2016) plays out within educational settings. By moving against group conformity, they avoid stereotype confirmations (e.g., unintelligent) and reject social expectations (Ojeda et al., 2012) of being a Latino/x male on campus while needing to matter (Huerta & Fishman, 2019) and cope (i.e., walk with angry face; Castellanos et al., 2018). Such experiences shape how Latino/x males use strength-based culture-informed processes (e.g., *gananas*; Easley et al., 2012) to fulfill "triple

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shifts" (i.e., working at home, working for pay to support their family, and attending school full time; Castellanos et al., 2020, p. 52). Collectively, these messages about roles and responsibilities are steeped in and informed by Latino/x male identity and masculinity.

The conceptualization of "maleness" or *macho* has varied from pathological to cultural notions of self. Original conceptualizations involved strict notions of hypermasculinity such as being promiscuous, dominant, and aggressive toward others (Arciniega et al., 2008; Cervantes, 2006; Diaz et al., 2016) and emotionally restrictive and avoidant of the feminine (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). "Being manly" emphasized pathological notions of strength, power, and control, in particular, show no vulnerability or weakness (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016; Mirandé, 2016). Realigning *machismo* with the indigenous strengths inherent to Latinx values (Mirandé, 2016), a bidimensional conceptualization reflecting positive and negative components emerged (Arciniega et al., 2008; Casas et al., 1994). Positive *machismo* included providing for and protecting family, engaging as a community leader, being spiritually and emotionally available, holding a strong sense of dignity and responsibility through respect, honor, and being a person of their word (Arciniega et al., 2008; Casas et al., 1994; Cervantes, 2006; Diaz et al., 2016; Mirandé, 2016). Centering the strengths of values, Arciniega et al. (2008) aligned with the Spanish concept of *caballerismo* that represents dignity, honor, and chivalry with positive *machismo*. Whether *caballerismo* or positive *machismo*, key considerations are how or from whom the notion of maleness stems. For instance, Latino maleness is informed by family and social influences, such as religion and spirituality, cultural values, and ethnic pride (Diaz et al., 2016). That is, what it means to be a man (vs. subscribe to an expected gender role) and to make meaning via cultural values and processes (Diaz et al., 2016; Mirandé, 2016) are influenced by elders and affirmed in early development for Latino males (Cervantes, 2006).

Indeed, masculinity is a "compass" for how Latino males "conduct themselves, how to treat others, and how to remain true to their own values" (p. 998); a process in which they reject monolithic understandings of masculinity (Walters & Valenzuela, 2020). Likewise, as Latino/x males hold varied identities and experiences, how they manifest their masculinity in predominantly White higher educational settings warrants consideration. Implementing the male gender role conflict framework to understand the role of *machismo* and *caballerismo* with Latino men in a community college, Sáenz et al. (2015) reported how cultural expectations around masculinity through status achievement, dominance, self-reliance, and avoidance of the feminine conflicted students' values. Moving away from the feminine has emerged as a fear of being perceived as intellectual by peers and are instead expected to move toward hyper-masculine behaviors of dominance and aggression (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). With family, they also experienced challenges and potential shame when questioned about "delaying work" and messaged to be a primary provider. These experiences direct scholars to orient students' cultural values when exploring their educational processes (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). Although cultural dominance-assisted Latino/x males' educational persistence (Sáenz et al., 2015), it also served as a "double-edged sword" due to the stigma of negative *machismo*. The strength-based processes of cultural values and resilience among Latinx communities reflect the nuanced complexity for belonging and centers *familismo*, protects identities and ethnic pride, and defines one's notion of masculinity

(Castellanos et al., 2018; Diaz et al., 2016). Specifically, how Latino/x men tap into their identities to navigate the educational context at predominantly White institutions is questioned. Latino/x men have simultaneously moved with and against cultural assumptions and expectations in making sense of what it means to be a Latino/x male in higher education (e.g., being a Latino/x man vs. being a Latino/x college man; Sáenz et al., 2015).

Theoretical Approach and Study Purpose

Our study implemented a whole student perspective and person-environment approach using a PSC framework (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). The dimensions of self-beliefs (psychological), relationships and connections (social), and values and worldviews (cultural), individually and collectively inform student educational experiences within the educational setting. Given how Latinx/o males access different elements of themselves to traverse their educational setting (Cerezo et al., 2013; Ojeda et al., 2012; Vasquez et al., 2020), our study sought to understand how their self-understanding, relationships, and values informed their identities. Specifically, this study explored how Latino/x males name, process, and manifest their social identities to create unique educational experiences within higher education. The core questions were modeled directly from the PSC framework and examined how students' self-beliefs (psychological), relationships and connections (social), and values (cultural) inform their educational processes. The interview questions were: 1) Which social identities are most salient for undergraduate Latino/x males (C)? 2) How does campus climate inform the cultural identity of undergraduate Latino/x males (P)? and 3) How do students' social identities and campus experiences inform their sense of belonging (S)?

Method

Setting and Procedure

The study was conducted at a large predominantly White midwestern 4-year institution, with approximately 32,000 undergraduates, of whom 5,600 were classified as students of color. Latinx students were the largest marginalized racial/ethnic group at almost 2,000 students, of whom almost half were males (Office of the Registrar, 2022). Despite increased numbers of Black, Indigenous, and students of color, and diversity inclusion efforts at the university, racial hate-based incidents informed the campus climate and prompted student-led activism.

Participants were interviewed within two-and-a-half months of the spring semester. Recruitment occurred with scholarship programs, multicultural student organizations, and program coordinators after securing appropriate research approval. Flyers were also posted across campus to reach students unaffiliated with formal programs and organizations. The emails and flyers provided information about purpose, participation, and information needed to schedule an interview. Participants first completed a 5-min demographic form regarding personal (e.g., racial/ethnic identity), academic (e.g., major and grade point average), and social (e.g., student organizations) information, followed by a 45-min virtual interview. Students were offered a 10\$ gift card for their participation, with one participant denying the incentive and instead wanting to learn more about graduate school from the interviewer, postinterview.

Student Participants

We interviewed 10 Latino male undergraduates (i.e., 1 first-year, 2 sophomores, 3 juniors, 2 seniors, and 2 fifth-year seniors) between the ages of 19 and 23 ($M = 20.70$, $SD = 1.42$). The students self-identified as Mexican, Mexican American, Mexican and Puerto Rican, multiracial, Afro-Latino, Guatemala, Latino American, Latinx, Latino, and Hispanic. Six identified as first-generation college students. Students reported being academically and socially active (i.e., six involved in on-campus and off-campus organization). Seven participants were double majors, and eight were enrolled in a Latino studies certificate program, with reported grade point averages ranging from 2.60 to 3.70 ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.07$).

Process of Data Analyses

Team Positionality

Acknowledging our positionalities (i.e., insider and outsider statuses; Holmes, 2020), we took reflective evaluation as self-identified Latinas who share educational spaces and provide support services for Latino male undergraduates. We hold the insider status of cultural intuition and knowledge as we centered our personal and academic Latinx identities (Pérez Huber et al., 2018) regarding values, processes, and expectations of Latino/x males within the higher education context. More specifically, we have experienced first-hand negative experiences and assumptions about our capacities and sense of unwelcome as Latinx thus drew from our insider knowledge to provide contextualized perspective (Pérez Huber et al., 2018). Yet, we also hold outsider status to the Latino male undergraduate experience and the specific intersection of identities that inform one's sense of self, space, and meaning. Reflecting on our similar yet different converging experiences, we discussed our working assumptions at each study step (e.g., that Latino/x males would describe having negative educational experiences; difficulty finding participants) to ensure accurate representation of students' narratives.

Content Analysis and Data Trustworthiness

We implemented LeCompte's (2000) five-step process to analyze students' interviews. Step 1 involved cleaning and organizing the narratives transcribed via the virtual interview system. Step 2 involved searching for frequency, omission, and declaration of data and identifying repeated data. Step 3 involved grouping the items by concept similarity and combining taxonomies in a meaningful way that later served as the basis for larger patterns and themes in Step 4. Within these steps, we engaged in ongoing checks to determine how the patterns and themes were categorized and aligned within each dimension of the PSC framework. Last, Step 5 identified emergent metathemes by combining larger patterns and themes, which was the holistic integration or interplay of the dimensions (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

To ensure data trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we openly discussed and processed the nature of the group dynamic between team members for credibility. Naming these dynamics prompted our reflection and collaboration to center the participants' narratives and ensured accurate representation of their experiences. The team attended confirmability by actively processing named assumptions, revisiting transcripts and field notes, and reconfiguring items and their location across the PSC dimensions as part of team consensus.

Furthermore, as we identified illustrative statements, metathemes, themes, and subthemes deepened our conceptualization. Transferability should be cautioned as participants were primarily upper-division students involved in student-support programs at a predominantly White midwestern university. How students engaged and shared their narrative may have also depended on their student standing, college generation status, and similarities/differences of social locations held by the interviewer and interviewee. For instance, the students' intersectional standing may have informed their expressed feelings of responsibility to respond to the unmet needs of the younger generation of Latinx students on campus.

Emergent Metathemes and Themes

Four metathemes (i.e., Naming What I Know, Awareness, Action, and Deepening the Narrative: Pick a Struggle) emerged as 10 Latino/x males named, processed, and manifested their identities on a predominantly White campus. Each of the PSC dimensions collectively informed the metathemes to demonstrate how the Latino males' manifested their nuanced and multilayered identities. Doing so highlighted their unique and meaningful challenges and struggles and subsequent meaning-making via a holistic, strength-based, and culturally steeped processes. For clarity, the metathemes, themes, and subthemes are provided in Table 1. To bring voice to their narratives, we used their student-selected pseudonyms of Atlas, Cece, Jaciel, John, Rafa, Stefano, Senior Luis, Sophomore Luis, and Victor.

Naming What I Know

The process of Naming What I Know includes three independent ways of knowing that informed students' identities: Knowledge of Self, Knowledge of Home, and Knowledge of Campus and informed students' identities.

Knowledge of Self

Knowledge of Self reflects students' ability to name which social identities feel most salient as undergraduate students. Students primarily identified race and ethnicity as their most salient identity despite using different terminology (e.g., Chicano, Mexican, Mexican and Puerto Rican, and Afro-Latino) and likely reflects the range of experiences and early messages received about their racial and ethnic background. For example, Senior Luis acknowledged how context informs his definition of race and ethnicity.

I say I'm Latino when people ask, but under that it's Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano. [Chicano] is the term that I use now, after going to school and learning about identity. It's just more targeted to my experiences, and the experiences of people that I know and grew up with. Chicano is the best one.

Furthermore, Victor addressed the intersection of social locations and described how he subsequently sought community.

I find ethnic identity most salient, and then financial background. I'm able to interact and connect with people on a level of their ethnic identity—celebrate music, food, and common life experiences. I also find greater camaraderie with those of similar financial background. I grew up around a lot of people of low income and so I know that they stick together in college.

Table 1
Overview of Emergent Metathemes, Themes, and Subthemes

Metatheme	Theme	Subtheme
Naming What I Know	Knowledge of Self Knowledge of Home	Specific identity Location <i>Conocimiento</i> <i>Honrando</i> Owning up
	Knowledge of Campus	Naming that the setting is biased/hateful This is how the setting is biased/hateful
Awareness	Awareness of Self	I have an awareness of how others see me I have an awareness of how I want to show up I have an awareness of who I am and how I fit into the context of racism
	Awareness That I Don't Belong	I know and can name I do not belong How I know I don't belong
	Awareness of The Role of Capital	Not knowing what to expect Naming the different starting points and privileges
Action	<i>Comunidad</i>	Find commonality Reinforce solidarity Welcome to bring my identity forward
	Stand Up and Show Up	I don't want to have to stand out But I will Protect and Preserve: It is what it is What I do with what I know to belong Trying to share what I know
Deepening the Narrative: Pick a Struggle		

Knowledge of Home

Knowledge of Home highlights teachings regarding identity, culture, and community, a process that Delgado Bernal (2001) identifies as “pedagogies of the home.” Within Knowledge of Home, the subthemes of *Conocimiento* (being aware), *Honrando* (honoring), and Owning Up emerged. *Conocimiento* describes how students hold awareness of their parents’ home country and generational values and teachings to meaningfully understand identity and culture. For instance, Uri stated,

I think [home country] allows me to connect more and own up. I take a step back, remember who I am, and see it as a decolonizing process to truly know who I am where I come from, and my culture—the knowledge that is passed down. I get validation to dig more and own up important parts of myself that have shaped my perspective and how other people probably see me.

Honrando honors their familial and ancestral teachings. Students described the challenges endured by their *familia* as part of their *Conocimiento*. In turn, students like Stefano pursued higher education to honor ancestral sacrifices.

I want to show people that [college] is not impossible and that [I'm] carrying many different lives behind me in terms of what my parents went through and how they pushed, letting me be where I am today; anything is possible. I think identity, in terms of being proud, keeps me strong.

Similarly, John described representing his family and community by entering and creating new spaces, stating, I'm the first son. I have little sisters and my dad, since I was raised, would say, “you're the groundbreaker,” “you're the wall breaker and you have to set an example—you must do this, must do that.”

Owning Up builds on *Honrando* as students navigated academia with pride about their identity and culture. For example, Uri described how embracing his culture meant honoring his whole self.

I must do the self-work, and I think the most important part of it all is owning up. I am Afro-Latino, I have African ancestry and I have Indigenous roots. I was not aware and in tune with parts of myself to the extent I am now.

Victor described being “a lonely only,” a process of being one of few racially/ethnically marginalized students within educational settings (Gloria et al., 2017). He referenced how educational attainment statistics prompted his racial and ethnic identity pride.

I think race and ethnicity [is most salient for Latino/x undergraduate males], especially here at a PWI. I'm in classes where I don't see somebody else that looks like me. It is important, as a Latino male in higher education, to know and be proud, because I'm pretty sure the statistics are low to finish 4-year degrees or beyond.

Knowledge of Campus

Knowledge of Campus informed students' perceptions of self on campus fraught with negative experiences, a process consonant to other literature on Latinx males in higher education (Castellanos et al., 2018; Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Sáenz et al., 2018). Experiencing and witnessing constant hate, bias, and microaggressions contributed to students' knowledge of campus as Jaciel indicated.

I came here for an education, I'm not here for the hate. In class we talked about what it's like to be a person of color on campus. In my small group with three White student, I shared being stared at while getting food. I've also been asked if I was the janitor here in my residence hall. I've

been asked which country I come from. I've experienced racial discrimination from one of my professors. There's no real pinpoint because it's everywhere.

Students discussed covert hate and bias when resources failed to meet their needs and their differences and requests were disregarded. For example, Senior Luis named and challenged the university's "colorblind" approach.

You can't solve discrimination by acting like it's not there. I feel [the university] promotes my identity and it's like they either do or don't, that's an easy way for them to not go out of their way to say "Oh, we serve Latinos." They're not going to be overtly discriminatory to us and they act like we're not here. We are all students but our differences [set us apart]. The problem is when differences are ignored.

Students also described university practices rooted in subtle (e.g., difficult interactions and lack of resources) and hate-filled experiences (e.g., blatant microaggressions and differential classroom treatment) prompting disconnection from identity as Rafa described.

If I'm speaking Spanish on the phone with my family when I'm at school, everyone stares. It's not just "Oh you caught my attention stare because you're speaking in another language" it's a sustained stare has additional meaning to it.

Awareness

Awareness captures a higher order process of engaging with and making meaning of social identities. Awareness considers how the university informs students' experiences.

Awareness of Self

Students differentiated between how the university perceived them and how they wanted to show up by owning different elements of awareness. That is, they had awareness of how others saw them, how they wanted to show up, how they needed to show up, and how they fit into the context of racism.

I Have an Awareness of How Others See Me captures understanding of racial and ethnic identity being based on others' perceptions known to limit students' engagement with others. For example, Rafa sought out different communities based on negative perceptions of his racial and ethnic identity.

I'm American, but other people don't see me as that first and that's objective. It's something I consider when dealing with people. It's objective because I can talk to any other Latino like they're a family member and connect right away. But with White people, it's not the same.

Similarly, students described how negative perceptions from the university informed how they internalized and accepted their own identity. For example, Jaciel described how being an underrepresented student on campus reframed his expectations of self.

I know and accept that I am a minority. I've learned to live with it and not let it stop me. We don't have to live up to the standard they set for us. I'm trying to teach myself this and navigate imposter syndrome that I've had since the beginning of this semester.

Students also described having an Awareness of how they want to show up on campus. For example, John sought to model a different image of what it means to be in higher education.

I'm probably less than 5% ... that's added pressure—you must always show up. You must show up and test, show up and submit assignments. You can't enable the narrative that Latinos or people of color don't belong here. They don't think you're as smart as other people, you don't want to play into that.

By working to disconfirm stereotypes, Rafa chose not to stand out.

We're a part of a predominantly White state and they have prejudice, stereotypes, and biases against Latinos. We're aware of those stereotypes and we try not to confirm them. At the same time, we're putting ourselves into a desirable kind of identity.

I Have an Awareness of How I Need to Show Up

Students also had an awareness of how they need to show up that differed from how they wanted to show up. Atlas's understanding of the university's color-blind approach informed his awareness.

It takes a village. Those who have the opportunity to give back can study the effects of a policy and take a broader view to help. Since a very young age, I've had the opportunity to give back. I must learn as much as I can to improve our community, our people. It's one step at a time. So, right now we're focused on the [city] community, [university]. I hope to expand because as we know more about Latinos within [state], it's similar across the nation. There are working communities and Latinos in need everywhere and we need to amplify our voices so they can't ignore us.

Senior Luis also described showing up for himself by naming that he has been "doing school for four years, [he] definitely belongs" in higher education. Belonging held a new meaning that distinguishes between having the knowledge and skills to be in higher education and feeling connected to the specific university (Dueñas & Gloria, 2017).

Students also described how messages about their cultural identity (e.g., needing to acculturate) determined where they felt connected. Having received messages throughout their educational careers, students were selective about the communities they sought while assessing if or how to alter their identity, particularly given the sociopolitical campus climate, biases, and stereotypes. Rafa reflected,

Right around the time that Trump was campaigning and got elected, it wasn't good to be Mexican among the majority. They were saying that Mexicans are stealing jobs and being lazy ... I'm Mexican but that's not me. Coming to college I learned about prejudice, stereotypes, bias, and internalized racism, and wow, that totally happened to me. It's been a journey figuring out how I feel about myself and I feel comfortable ... I'm used to meeting new people and making connections. I understand that in [state], White people are a little more reserved. I sense that they're judging me for being extroverted, but they're also judging me being a brown person.

Awareness That I Don't Belong

I Know and Can Name That I Do Not Belong and *How I Know That I Don't Belong* emerged from *Awareness That I Don't Belong*. These themes prompted reflection about their presence on campus. Students described *How I Know I Don't Belong* as the foundation for engaging in actionable steps to advance their educational experience. Cece explicitly conveyed not belonging as he stated, "Not to be dramatic, but I just don't feel like I belong. I feel like it's the experience of a lot of people of color, a lot of Latino males, a lot of Latinx people in general." Stefano also expressed dismay at the

process of not belonging as he stated, "Even if I quit my studies, the university wouldn't care, so I don't belong to the university."

Students also knew they did not belong based on others' experiences. For example, Sophomore Luis described being impacted by his Latino/x male peer that prompted collective belonging (Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; Harper, 2010).

[My Latino/x male peer] noticed that there were other White people who got up and moved to not sit by him. It didn't happen to me but I can understand his frustration with how it affects him, affects how he studies, how he learns, how he may feel with others around him, how he will be, or how it affects him overall.

Awareness of the Role of Capital

Last, primarily first-generation college students, engaged in Awareness of the role of capital, naming the absence of wealth and generational status (Kouyoumdijan et al., 2016). Specifically, students had awareness of (limited) educational privileges as first generation to college. Two subthemes emerged: Not Knowing What to Expect and Naming the Different Starting Points and Privileges. Senior Luis shared how Not Knowing What to Expect as a first-generation college student posed unique challenges.

It's the extra pressure, I never had anybody telling me what's difficult or know anybody that graduated from this school to tell me what schools are good for specific majors. I'm figuring it out year to year and I've learned a lot in four years. But the first year here, I didn't know. No one is ever really prepared, right? But it's difficult when you don't know anyone that has gone to college.

Similarly, Atlas addressed not knowing the expectations of college.

Being a first-generation student, we come in with no expectations and with the most expectations. We are told to do things we've never done before but to be done in a fashion as if we've always done it. ... Some have had the opportunity to learn, negotiate and process these spaces. They [continuing-generation college students] have the tools and the resources to succeed, they're given an upper hand. They've given us a stack of cards that at first glance looks better and it goes back to what first-generation students need to do to maintain or to stay within these spaces. For many first-generation students, academics isn't the only thing they have. They have one or multiple jobs, they're involved in student organizations, they're involved in community organizations. First generation students are given a different college experience than other individuals. Even our kids will likely have an upper hand, they're going to know the ins and outs. They're going to know how to outline their paper, do legal research analysis, do things that we're learning and struggling with, and they're going to be taught it over a dinner conversation. Coming on this campus as first-generation students we also come equipped with different skills because from a young age, as Latinos we're told and learn to adapt to the society in a different format than our peers.

Cece also navigated the educational experiences differently from continuing-generation peers by recognizing different "starting points" (e.g., finances) that informed his campus experiences.

Action

Having the knowledge and awareness of being a Latino/x male on campus, students named actionable steps to manifest their social identities. Students differentiated these action-oriented steps by home and campus, where home detailed a sense of responsibility for

working within the Latinx community to create different educational experiences despite knowledge and awareness of how their identity is perceived on campus. Three themes emerged: Comunidad, Stand Up and Show Up, and What I Do with What I Know to Belong.

Comunidad

Finding Commonality, Reinforcing Solidarity, and Welcome to Bring My Identity Forward emerged within Comunidad. Students defined community to exist within commonality and solidarity (Reyes, 2017) between racial and ethnic groups. Specifically, Comunidad meant feeling welcomed to express their identity. Senior Luis found comfort and ease in shared similar experiences with other Latinx students given his first interaction at a predominantly White institution. Cece also expressed,

Latino people make me feel a little safer, a little more comfortable, and I could relate to them because a lot of Latinos and people around me have gone through the same struggles and situations. That's what we bond about.

Students, like Victor, also described Reinforcing Solidarity between racial groups, as he stated, "I think that instances of hate or bias definitely reinforce our solidarity and cause more intent on being proud of where we come from."

Furthermore, students called for non-Latinx students' solidarity to learn about persisting challenges of Latinx students by encouraging dialog that invites students of color to share their campus experience.

They're welcome to learn more about our struggles, but engage with everyone, not just with who you're comfortable. Don't judge a book by its cover, because what you think will be discussed could be one of the best blessings.

Finally, the Latino men explained the significance of being welcomed to bring their identity forward when seeking community (Reyes, 2017). Atlas discussed opportunities for creating communities by way of honoring and engaging intersecting identities.

When I arrived on campus I wasn't here trying to graduate for myself. I oriented towards spaces with other Latino individuals. It became apparent that we were all trying to win, to graduate, to succeed. In a sense we created our own family here. It scoped to my organizations who are primarily Latino students. We are looking for success and helping each other succeed.

Stefanno described an early encounter in his educational experience that welcomed him to bring his identity forward.

[It was] coincidence that I met this person. He helped me to know other people by bringing me around, that's what let me manifest and expand myself. I was meeting all these people, and had my group of friends that learned about [Latino fraternity] and that's where it all started. The community won't reject you. He was a stranger and said, "hey, man, what's up, let me show you around, get to know my friends." I was really happy for that because I learned a lot.

Stand Up and Show Up

Students' processes encompassed *I don't want to have to stand out, But I will*, and *Protect and Preserve*. Students questioned the university's concern toward their well-being, with many feeling tokenized and promoted for diversity. Likewise, students questioned

whether engaging in diversity programming might suggest that they are incapable or, when compared with White peers, lack “self-merit.” Students feared enabling the narrative of not belonging, being perceived as incompetent, or not qualifying to attend the specific university (e.g., navigated university on their own vs. joining a diversity program that offered extra support). Senior Luis stated,

People are inclined to think “all POC, they’re not that smart; they’re only here because of affirmative action.” That’s why I feel I must perform well in school and do all these things to show “hey, I’m here.” I have the grades and test scores to be here. I belong here. I give a way for people that are coming after me. Every year, more students of color are coming, and I think that’s because we do our thing to lead the way for the next people.

Although many students worked to avoid standing out and confirm stereotypes, they also made their presence known. They knew aspects of their identity that were important to the university yet led to experiences of tokenization. Students worried about “representing” for all Latino/x males knowing the within-group differences yet felt responsible to serve their communities. Similar to previous research (Gloria et al., 2009), the Latino men leaned into their negative campus experiences to understand how it informed their awareness.

These experiences were described to model (Huerta & Fishman, 2019) persistence and pride when serving their community. *But I will* differed from *Owning Up* by providing university context to how they approach hostile campus environments. Specifically, *But I will* addresses how negative campus climate feeds into their sense of belonging. For example, when asked how campus climate informs their social identity, Uri described needing to “represent” in spaces where Latino/x males were underrepresented.

It helps me appreciate and value it because there aren’t many Latinos here, so everywhere I go I say I’m from [country]. It’s a very important part of me. Others should know that there are Latinos from [place]. So I have to shout—hey, we are here.

John also expressed pride yet identified that it was coupled with being alone.

[Expressing pride] supports who I am, makes me prouder of my rich culture—the food that we have makes me more proud realizing that not everybody gets to experience what I do. But then, it makes me a bit lonelier, it makes me feel more isolated because there are not many people who look like me or have the same experience as me. It goes both ways, it contributes in a good way but it also can negatively impact you.

Students described finding strength in their identity despite feeling dismissed by the university. In turn, students protected and preserved their identity through strength-oriented practices regardless of the social and cultural messages they received. By Protecting and preserving, students owned their cultural strengths and engaged how their identity stems from different ways of knowing (e.g., educational and cultural) that are not supported by the university. Importantly, students avoided addressing campus concerns in the moment and instead worked through concerns at a time that felt most appropriate for their well-being. For example, Sophomore Luis felt that “[Latino/x males] would either shrug it off or shut it down where it doesn’t bother them, or they try not to let it get to them.” Similarly, Jaciel poignantly shared,

At this point, hate is becoming a lifestyle here. I’m so used to it that sometimes my mind blocks it out and I don’t want to acknowledge it until later. I don’t let it get to me and it’s sad, but I don’t have the energy for it. I came here for an education, I’m not here for the hate.

What I Do With What I Know to Belong

In contrast to existing research (e.g., Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002; Dueñas & Gloria, 2020), students found belonging outside of university-based student organizations and student spaces. Rafa stated,

At this university there are intended spaces for me to be myself, but, I didn’t find that within the spaces meant for me. Like the [Latinx Student Organization], or even the orgs I am part of. Instead, I established a friend group that supports me and my growth.

Similarly, students expressed worry and skepticism that engaging in organized spaces would confirm stereotypes and communicate negative messages about Latino males and their racial and ethnic identity. Negotiating a paradox, students are told that they do not belong on campus or are not enough by the same individuals who develop the spaces for them to create community and belonging. The challenges to be part of a community and experience sense of belonging persisted as Victor stated, “That’s because I do feel like I belong but like I said, it took a lot of intentional planning to get there.”

Students also described being of service to others on campus, specifically to the future generation of Latino/x students. Although they acknowledged that they would not experience the positive outcomes, they sought to create spaces for future Latino/x students. For example, Atlas discussed his campus and community efforts to create spaces of belonging.

[O]ur spaces aren’t as solidified as others spaces. We need to create these spaces so that we can nurture our personal well-being. It takes a lot of work to run these organizations, get the word out, and put on community events, and work with community partners, and uplift the Latino community. But in doing all that work, is creating, giving that sense of belonging because you soon realize that you belong “to do the work.” You belong in the spaces that you chose. We have created a sense of belonging so that others can come and get the opportunity to belong, just as other students get to. It’s going to be different for me and my peers. Future Latino/xs will come on campus and have Latino organizations with solidified campus partners and major departments. They won’t have to think too much about it. They’ll just get to jump right in and have that sense of community.

Cece experienced entering predominantly White settings (i.e., an academic major club that is predominantly White and primarily women) was an example of being of service to their community as one of few Latino/x males in higher education,

Having Latino male confidence, presence, is breaking into White spaces. There’s this [academic major club] that is all White students. I’ve been trying to push myself a little more and I signed up for the club. They volunteer and give back, sending bags full of food and clothes to people downtown. I’ve wanted to join, but I don’t know anybody. The club is these White girls, but whatever, let me try it out and be part of it too.

Being of service to others at home meant greater representation on campus and for the community. That is, students processed their knowledge and awareness of their educational experiences for

family members seeking higher education, which was fueled by the sacrifices of their ancestors. For example, Senior Luis envisioned sharing his efforts, work, and awareness with the future generation of Latinx students so that they could experience more.

I'm a multicultural person on campus and I'm doing everything that everybody else is doing, if not more. Sometimes I have to prove I can do more than others. Sometimes, they might feel more entitled to be here. So, when I'm older, I can tell my kids I went to [university]. I never had that experience of saying my parents graduated from here, grandparents graduated from here. So, it's almost like trailblazing.

Students also recognized that their ancestors' narrative propelled them and informed how they "kept going." Manifesting the dreams of his ancestors, Uri embodied their resilience and persistence.

It is important for you to be sure of yourself, know who you are, know what you bring to the table because there will always be haters, and you have to keep going. I look back at what my ancestors went through, but the ancestors of all the communities of color here in the U.S. ... our ancestors didn't do all this just for us to not make it. We're here because of them. Why will you let them down when we have them creating and giving us strength in many ways in the present moment. So those are the things that keep me going, even though I know these systematic factors that try to make me believe otherwise.

Trying to Share What I Know

Students also tried (alluding to process that encompasses struggle and hardship) sharing (i.e., teaching and encouraging other Latinx students) their educational experiences of not belonging with future generation of Latinx students as a way to cultivate community and learning through the struggle. For instances, Jaciel shared how he engaged this lesson with his younger sister as he "let her struggle. I remind her that we are first generation, we're going to struggle. She's not going to get it easy, but I do help her. That's one of the biggest struggles I faced as first generation."

Cece also described wanting to be a model for others in the same way others modeled for him about education.

When I was in middle school, high school, I thought "man I can't wait to begin college." I would see college students who came back to our high school and I thought how cool to see this Latino guy, that's three years older than me who's at [university]. I see him with a [university] hoodie and backpack. I used to think that was cool and now I'm here too and doing the same for my family and community.

Deepening the Narrative: Pick a Struggle

Being first generation to college was a deeply ingrained experience that tapped into a critical and complex dimension of their narratives. The intersection of identities as a first-generation Latino male college student called for an intensified balance of multiple struggles. Described as an added and different layer to their experience than their non-Latinx peers, these struggles were part of the exponential process of experiences and occurrences Jaciel poignantly expressed,

Being a first-generation college student adds another struggle because it's a struggle with my identity and then having to be a first-generation student. The first thing that comes to my mind is "pick a struggle."

Similarly, Atlas named that Latinx communities rose from difficulty, struggle, and hard work. He wanted others to know

that first-generation college students do not take for granted their access to or place in higher education as he proudly stated,

We are so privileged to be in these spaces and that's not to say that we haven't worked hard or twice as hard as anybody else. It's acknowledging that we are privileged to be in these spaces, that nobody in our past has been here before and we do not to take that for granted.

Implications and Student Directives

Centering the narratives of 10 Latino males at a predominantly White 4-year institution, emergent metathemes and themes grounded in the PSC framework and its holistic approach in understanding students' experiences, indicated how campus climate directly informs their engagement with and manifestation of their social identities. Despite experiencing institutional hate and discrimination, they were motivated to persist in honor of their social identities and values. Our findings are consonant with previous findings, in that social identities shaped by cultural values serve as protective factors (Diaz et al., 2016; Liang et al., 2016; Mirandé, 2016; Walters & Valenzuela, 2020) and sources of motivation and resilience for Latino/x males (Patrón & Garcia, 2016). For instance, aligned with an intersectional study of Latina undergraduates' social identities (Liang et al., 2016), the participants did not name gender as a salient identity; however, participants spoke about being a Latino, which included maleness or notions of positive masculinity.

As academic institutions serve a growing number of Latino/x male students (Excelencia in Education, 2019), focusing on how these challenges (e.g., lack of belonging, feeling tokenized, and pressure to conform to cultural expectations) are normalized warrants address, with the Latino males providing specific directives. First, create opportunities beyond affinity spaces to share Latinx student challenges as such efforts could serve to unite and integrate campus communities versus isolate based on social identities, which can create meaningful and action-based outcomes (Rowell & Hong, 2018). In particular, bringing this process into the classroom and other learning (research labs) and living spaces (residence halls) for further implementation, promotion, and engagement of diversity among all culturally diverse students was recommended for bilateral learning and deep-structure belonging that builds connections within and between racial groups. Doing so can allow Latino/x men to share in the rejection of monolithic understanding of masculinity thereby creating their individual and unique meanings of being Latino/x male in higher education. Importantly, student services personnel, in particular counselors and academic advisors, must consider how they themselves and programs might be viewed with suspicion and potentially counterproductive to the Latino/x male sense of belonging as they are accountable and culpable as direct facilitators of campus climate.

As such, university personnel (e.g., academic advisors and instructors) must work to center Latino/x males' experiences in classroom and college life spaces that move away from the unfortunate constancy of rendering students' experiences as invisible. In contrast to beliefs that Latino/x males do not want to or would be reserved to share their educational experiences (Arciniega et al., 2008), all 10 were forthright and emotionally expressive about their struggles and experiences of "institutional academic violence" (Cueva, 2014, p. 216) and "racial battle fatigue" (Franklin et al., 2014, p. 304) that should be further explored in the counseling setting. In particular, they expressed gratitude and relief

to bring their identities forward in a space that would be respected, validated, and heard. Students described the interview as an opportunity and responsibility as *caballeros* (Arciniega et al., 2008) to show up and serve Latinx communities as *hombres de palabra* (men of their word, Mirandé, 2016). This responsibility represented a higher order understanding of stepping into their Latino male cultural and strength-based values to honor their generational sacrifices, protect their families (Sáenz et al., 2018), and uphold Latinidad across campus communities (Castellanos et al., 2020). Increasingly so, they internalized educational responsibility and expectations (Castellanos et al., 2020) that must be understood through the intersection of social identities and the context of their cultural values. Thus, conveying curiosity and willingness to listen to students' *testimonios* (life-learned stories) to identify the strength-based processes (Castellanos et al., 2020) inherent in their struggle and perseverance is recommended for all university personnel (e.g., counselors, advisors, instructors, and mentors). For instance, posing the simple yet complexly nuanced question of "What does it mean for you to be a Latino male in higher education" is foundational to acknowledging, processing, and make-meaning of their educational experiences.

Overall, the Latino males demonstrated keen awareness about when, where, why, and the extent to which they belong on campus. They moved forward with strength and purposed intention by amplifying their narrative for others to know and understand. For example, asking about the Latino male experience as a first-generation college student deepened their narrative around *the struggle* and the intersection of their identities. Without an intended exploration or acknowledgement of intersections, scholars will miss deep narrative that informs how college generation informs students' campus experiences and sense of belonging. Scholars must inquire with cultural humility about intersections through a critical conscious insider and outsider lens to direct the policies and practices that inform students' experiences. Researchers, academic advisors, instructors, and counselors must consider how this awareness advances an authentic and unarguable narrative of their experiences and taps into their cultural expertise. Students are naming, processing, and manifesting their social identities as Latino men to move against systemic pressures and through educational challenges that fuels and sustains them to "stand up and show up" as they succeed for themselves, peers, families, and greater Latinx communities.

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