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TARYN OZUNA ALLEN

The University of Texas at Arlington

ASHLEY N. STONE

The George Washington University

ROBERT T. PALMER

Howard University

DINA C. MARAMBA

Claremont Graduate University

TRANG DINH

The University of Texas at Arlington

VICTOR B. SÁENZ

The University of Texas at Austin

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**Conexiones:
Latino Males' Sense of Belonging in Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

TARYN OZUNA ALLEN
The University of Texas at Arlington

ASHLEY N. STONE
The George Washington University

ROBERT T. PALMER
Howard University

DINA C. MARAMBA
Claremont Graduate University

TRANG DINH
The University of Texas at Arlington

VICTOR B. SÁENZ
The University of Texas at Austin

Men of color encounter a myriad of educational challenges as they traverse the K-16 educational pipeline (Lee & Ransom, 2011; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). Among Latino¹ males, postsecondary enrollment data demonstrates a critical achievement gap in college enrollment and degree attainment. For example, Latino males remain the least represented gender and racial group in postsecondary education, with only 29% of all 18- to 24-year olds enrolled in degree granting institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Further, once enrolled, research shows first-time, full-time Latino males earn fewer college degrees compared to their Latina counterparts, 49% and 57%, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which are institutions established prior to 1964 with the purpose of educating African Americans (US Department of Education, 2011), could be an ideal location for Latino male student success because of their historic mission and leadership in serving traditionally underserved student populations (Jewell, 2002). Research attributes positive student outcomes, including greater academic achievement, student engagement, and persistence for African American students enrolled in HBCUs (Bridges, Kinzie, Nelson Laird, & Kuh, 2008; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Fleming, 2001; Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006). Furthermore, previous research demonstrates African American males, in particular, fare well at HBCUs because the entire university community, such as faculty, administrators, peers, and staff, serves as a conduit to social capital, which helps to facilitate their retention and persistence (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Even when African American men are underprepared for college, HBCUs can act as a transformative space that promotes persistence and success (Palmer,

¹For this study, we use the term “Latino” when specifically focused on male students. We use the term “Latinx” as a gender neutral and more inclusive term referring to the Hispanic community. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), Hispanics include “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (p. 2). We only use the word “Hispanic” when it is required by historical context, federal classification, or direct quotes.

Davis, Maramba, 2010). Yet, while few studies have examined the unique experiences of Latinx students attending HBCUs (i.e., Allen, 2016; Allen & Stone, 2016; Palmer, Maramba, Allen, & Goings, 2015), research focusing specifically on the experiences of Latino male students at HBCUs is uncharted territory.

Additional research on Latino males at HBCUs is particularly critical since Latino males outnumber Latina female students in HBCUs (Turner, 2006). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Latino male students' sense of belonging within two four-year Texas HBCUs. The following research questions guided this study: (1) How do Latino males describe their sense of belonging in HBCUs?; (2) what individuals, relationships, and experiences promote sense of belonging for Latino males enrolled in HBCUs?; and (3) what individuals, relationships, and experiences hinder sense of belonging for Latino males enrolled in HBCUs?

Literature Review

Sense of belonging is informed by psychological and sociological theories of literature and places emphasis on person-environment fit (Johnson et al., 2007). Strayhorn (2012) indicated that while sense of belonging is important to life, it is more important to college students given where they are in their personal development. Hurtado and Carter (1997) highlighted that "sense of belonging contains both cognitive and affective elements in that the individual's cognitive evaluation of his or her role in relation to the group results in affective response" (p. 328). Building on this work, Strayhorn (2012) argued that sense of belonging is particularly important for students who often feel at the margins of the institutions, such as racial and ethnic minorities, low-income, women, first-generation, and students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender.

Latinx Students' Sense of Belonging

Prior research has mostly focused on sense of belonging perceptions within the Latinx community at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). These studies found Latinx students' sense of belonging was influenced by the academic and social aspects of their collegiate experiences as well as their perceptions of campus climate. Research shows Latinx students benefit from student-faculty interactions, which can help facilitate sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007; Nuñez, 2009). The amount of time spent studying and students' GPA also influenced the student's commitment to the institution (Strayhorn, 2008). Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that discussing course content with other students outside of class and tutoring other students also had a positive impact on students' sense of belonging. Finally, scholars Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005), found academic support programs and discussing course material with peers outside of class promote a strong sense of belonging. Taken together, these studies demonstrated that academic engagement was critical to Latinx students' sense of belonging.

Further, social engagement through campus participation in on- and off-campus activities, including student organizations and community service, has promoted a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2009). In their study at a Hispanic Serving Institution, Maestas, Vasquez, and Zehr (2007) found participating in co-curricular activities positively influenced Latinx students' sense of belonging. Nuñez (2009) reported Latinx students may develop a sense of belonging through their relationships with a smaller peer group within their institution yet may not be as involved in the larger campus community.

The institutional climate, which is "the historical, structural, perceptual, and behavioral dimensions of the college environment" (Hurtado, 1994, p. 22), is also critical in promoting or hinder-

ing a strong sense of belonging among Latinx students. Latinx students are more likely to persist when they perceive the institution to be focused on student concerns and needs (Hurtado, 1994). Hurtado and Carter (1997) reported negative effects of an unwelcoming campus racial climate on Latinx students' sense of belonging and recommended institutions work towards fully understanding and integrating these students into campus experiences. Latinx students' perceptions of the campus climate are primarily influenced by their collegiate experiences (i.e., positive interactions with diverse peers, living on- or off-campus, or enrolling in a diversity course) (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maestas et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008), which subsequently affect their adjustment and connection to the institution (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). When Latinx students encounter a hostile campus environment, they successfully navigate the institution through community building (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), identifying strategies for changing the campus (Hurtado, 1994), and building relationships with peers and mentors (Pérez & Taylor, 2016).

Sense of Belonging within HBCUs

Research has shown that minority students in general and African American students specifically attend HBCUs because they believe that they will experience a sense of belonging (Gasman, 2008; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). This sense of belonging manifests in African American students feeling connected to their roots and to the African American culture (Freeman, 1999). Previous research also highlights the nurturing relationships African American students develop with their faculty members (Allen, 1992; Berger & Milem, 2000; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002), which helps promote a caring, family-like environment. Moreover, a litany of research has shown that this sense of belonging for African American students at HBCUs helps to foster a supportive, affirming, and nurturing environment; all of which facilitates African American students' self-efficacy, racial pride, psychological wellness, academic development, and persistence (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Kim, & Conrad, 2006).

Despite this, a paucity of research indicates positive and negative perceptions of sense of belonging among non-African American students enrolled in HBCUs. In particular, in a recent study of 12 students—6 of whom were Asian American and 6 of whom were Latinx—participants reported experiencing various forms of racial microaggressions, or an unintentionally discriminatory or prejudicial act, that created an uncomfortable campus climate (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). However, another study revealed the positive interactions with family members and peers who attended HBCUs, who offered academic and interpersonal validation, which promoted Latinx students' connections to their institution (Allen, 2016). The present study addresses a critical gap in the literature regarding Latino males' sense of belonging in HBCUs.

Conceptual Framework

According to Strayhorn (2012), a sense of belonging is a basic human need that influences thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and it is often described as a sense of connectedness. Students who have a strong sense of belonging feel they matter, and their presence is valued. A strong sense of belonging improves student retention and supports degree completion because students feel cared about within their campus community (Strayhorn, 2012). Promoting a sense of belonging is especially critical for traditionally underrepresented college students, and, specifically focusing on Latino males, can shed light on how to best foster connections between students, faculty, staff, and the overall campus.

Sense of belonging is composed of seven core elements (Strayhorn, 2012). This definition maintains sense of belonging 1) is a basic human need, 2) is a fundamental motive that drives human

behavior, 3) takes on a heightened importance in certain contexts, 4) is related to mattering, 5) is affected by the intersection of social identities, 6) engenders additional positive outcomes, and 7) must be continually satisfied while changing as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change. In the context of college, “sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, respected, valued by, and important” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17) to the campus community, faculty, and/or peers. This definition is consistent with the ways in which other scholars have defined various tenets of sense of belonging and served as the framework for this study (Johnson et al., 2007; Nora, 2004).

Methods

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of sense of belonging among ten Latino male undergraduate students enrolled in two, four-year HBCUs in Texas. Through interviews with the participants, this study offers insights into the experiences, interactions, and individuals that influenced their sense of belonging at HBCUs. This study’s epistemological approach was anchored in the constructivist tradition to construct knowledge, understanding, and meaning through human interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Site Selection

This study was part of a larger research project examining the first-year experiences and perceptions of sense of belonging among Latina/o college students enrolled in two Texas HBCUs, Smith University and Howell College (pseudonyms). We utilized purposeful sampling, which allowed us to intentionally select participants based on pre-selected criteria (Patton, 2002). The two institutional sites were selected because they sought to increase their enrollment of Latina/o students through recruitment efforts, scholarships, and community programs. As a result of these efforts, Latinx students represented 20% of the student body at Smith and 16% of the student body at Howell. Latino males represented between 40-70% of the entire Latinx community at these institutions, but the majority of Smith and Howell students identified as African American.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Students were eligible to participate in the broader study if they a) self-identified as Latinx and b) were currently enrolled as a sophomore, junior, or senior. With the help of on-campus administrators, we contacted eligible Latinx students via email. A total of 20 students responded and were eligible to participate in the study. For this study in particular, we selected only the male student transcripts (n=10) to explore their unique experiences and perceptions of sense of belonging. In the end, we had ten participants, which is line with prior phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

All of the participants in this study identified as Mexican American males. Four participants were from Smith University and six students were from Howell College. Half (n=5) of the participants in this study were in their junior year of college, and the other students included sophomores (n=3) and seniors (n=2). Academic majors included fine arts, business, natural sciences, liberal arts, and education. Nine participants shared they were first-generation college students. Most participants (n=7) lived off-campus, and half (n=5) worked off-campus. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

Data Collection

Data were collected through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews (Maxwell, 2005) at the participants' respective campus. Prior to beginning the interview, we explained the purpose of the study and answered any questions. Participants then completed the informed consent document to begin the interviews. The interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient for the participants.

We followed an abbreviated version of Seidman's (1998) three-step approach to interviewing. Although Seidman recommends a three-part interview, two interviews may be conducted to accommodate participants' schedules and time constraints. Therefore, each participant was interviewed twice, and each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. The first interview focused on the students' life histories and social, cultural, and educational experiences leading up to their matriculation in an HBCU. For example, we asked participants the following questions: (1) *Tell me about your educational experiences in high school;* (2) *how did you first decide you were going to pursue a college degree?;* (3) *how did you learn about HBCUs?;* and (4) *who helped you apply for and enroll in this HBCU?*

The second interview asked participants to share their personal reflections on their academic and social experiences and perceptions of sense of belonging upon matriculation at their respective HBCU. Questions during this interview included: (1) *Tell me about your relationships with your faculty and peers;* (2) *what has helped you feel like you belong at this institution?;* and (3) *what experiences, if any, have made it difficult for you to feel connected to this institution?*

Data Analysis

The audio of each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. We then listened to the audio recordings to check the transcripts for accuracy. After confirming the accuracy of the transcripts, we began to review the transcripts, keeping in mind our research questions and Strayhorn's (2012) definition of sense of belonging. We first employed open coding by line-by-line analysis of each transcript to identify emerging themes and subthemes among the participants' responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We then used axial coding to independently and then collaboratively determine which codes could be grouped or combined together with related themes and subthemes. We discussed our findings until consensus was reached. Finally, we employed selective coding to develop the overarching themes and to create a detailed account of the participants' perceptions of sense of belonging in HBCUs.

Trustworthiness

We employed several strategies to promote the trustworthiness of our data. First, we sent the students their transcripts to review and edit. These member checks helped to ensure the participants' voices were accurately represented. We also debriefed with researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2017) who are experts on Latinx college students and HBCUs. These conversations provided us with the opportunity to discuss our data and preliminary findings.

Limitations

There are two primary limitations for this study. First, the number of participants and select institutions sites could be perceived as a potential limitation. To address this limitation, we obtained rich, thick data to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the participants' lived experiences. Future research should expand upon this study to include additional research sites, both inside and

outside the state of Texas. Second, this study included participants who successfully persisted through their first year in college, and it does not offer insight into the experiences of Latino males who withdrew or transferred to another institution. Additional research should investigate the experiences of Latino males who depart from HBCUs to understand the obstacles to their sense of belonging and persistence.

Findings

Two themes emerged regarding what helped or hindered Latino males' sense of belonging in HBCUs. We describe the individuals, relationships, and experiences that shaped and informed their perceptions of mattering.

Forming Connections

The Latino males in this study identified two key influences in their connection to their HBCU. First, supportive relationships with faculty members helped them feel they mattered. In addition, an openness to diversity and a willingness to engage diverse peers created avenues to developing a sense of belonging.

Faculty. The majority of the participants in this study emphasized the integral role of faculty in promoting their sense of belonging. Students described their professors as relatable and personable. Peter, a junior majoring in education, shared that his faculty members “were friendly” and “by the end of the first week, they knew our names.” To him, that was “pretty cool,” and he liked “that people take the time to get to know who you are” at his HBCU. Levi, a sophomore student majoring in business, mentioned his professor’s similar, friendly approach, in that it helped students feel like they mattered:

As soon as I got there, everybody's friendly, you know, they introduced themselves. They told me like what department they worked for and if I ever needed something just go to them in case it was something related to their department.

Michael, a sophomore student who was married with two children, emphasized the assistance he received from HBCU faculty members. He recalled how his professors exceeded his expectations and were notably different from the professors with whom he previously interacted at the local community college:

From my experience from (community college) and here I know that here the professors, they'll help you out. Like, if you don't understand something, they'll actually be, they'll step aside and try to help you out or they'll look for a time after class to help you and from my experience at (community college), I mean, it's like a big university. They just go in the class, talk, if you got it fine, if not, I mean, that's it. I mean, so if, if you need that little extra help this is the place for you.

To Michael, professors at the HBCU seemed to be passionate about students learning and understanding of course material. By comparing his experiences at the community college, Michael illustrated that professors at the HBCU were more concerned about and interested in students' academic well-being. Receptive faculty members helped Latino males feel they connected to the institution and fostered close personal relationships.

Overall, Latino males in this study positively responded to their professors' strategies for promoting success. As a result, they often visited their professors during office hours and met with them outside of class. Fernando, who majored in business, shared he connected with “the majority of all the teachers,” and as a result, he felt he could “actually go to their office and talk to them.”

Levi shared, “I could always go to their office hours, and they would like it.” He explained these interactions facilitated his ability to get “pretty close to all of my professors.” Mark, a junior student athlete, similarly explained he valued the “one-on-one’s” with his professors. He felt “you can talk to your professors at any time” and “they’ll talk to you, and they’ll work with you,” which he perceived to be a distinct quality of his university. This genuine interest and extra effort exhibited by HBCU professors helped Latino males feel like their institution was home away from home.

Openness to diversity. The students’ connections with peers was shaped by their pre-college experiences with diverse communities. We found pre-college experiences with African Americans, in particular, shaped the students’ personal perceptions of the institution’s social context. For instance, Michael, Ernest (sophomore student who worked and lived off campus), Mark, and Abe (senior majoring in liberal arts) described extensive cross-racial interactions in their personal and academic life and how their personal experiences with African Americans in church, family life, or school provided a context for relating to their new campus culture. These experiences led the participants to view their new college environment as an opportunity to further learn from different cultures.

As an example, Mark entered the university with an openness towards interacting and developing relationships with their African American peers. Mark shared, “You know, we all have different backgrounds. We all come from different places, and that’s what college is about, you know. Interacting with people from different cultures.” According to Mark, it was expected that students enroll in college with the expectation to interact with individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and traditions. Therefore, according to him, students should anticipate encountering different backgrounds and perspectives and develop an accepting and welcoming attitude toward their peers. An understanding of customs as well as familiarity with HBCUs allowed Latino males to connect with peers and fit in with the campus culture.

Obstacles to Belonging

Three key challenges to developing a sense of belonging emerged. First, students of Latinx Greek Letter Organizations shared their frustration in finding on campus representation in campus Greek councils. In addition, the lack of representation in institutional events or marketing created obstacles to belonging. Finally, off-campus work responsibilities led Latino males to question their connections to the institutions.

Finding a space. Latino males’ involvement in student organizations highlighted their desire to create a cultural community within the HBCU but also created some challenges with inter-group relationships. Five of the participants actively engaged in on-campus activities through team sports and student organizations. On-campus organizations can create a space for students to find a sense of community and belonging. However, some participants in this current study shared an obstacle that emerged when they sought to establish a Latinx-based fraternity. Once chartered, the Latino fraternity was placed under the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), a council for historically African American Greek Letter Organizations. As a result, Fernando felt his fraternity was not valued: “[My] organization is, you know, we’re in the NPHC, so technically we’re like the, we’re in the lowest, you know, the lowest of the stack, so...other, other organizations get that, priority first before we do.”

Fernando felt his organization was “the lowest of the stack” because the organization was unable to vote or fully participate in business meetings. Further, Fernando recognized the organiza-

tion's operations were different from other NPHC organizations, and he believed the campus administrators did not acknowledge the distinguishing characteristics of a Latino fraternity. He shared, "Like two years ago, that they were going to try to make a [fraternal council] for Latinos. Uh, but I haven't heard anything from that. They were working on it, but how can they work on it, they don't really know how a Latino organization runs? Cause we're way different than they are. How can you, how can you have the person running the NPHC meeting try to figure out rules and regulations for the Latinos? You know, you can't, 'cause we don't work the same."

The Latino fraternity was included in NPHC meetings in hopes of fostering relationships and campus involvement. However, the national structure of NPHC omitted this group from fully contributing to meetings or programs. Without a vote or the ability to contribute to council business, the Latino male fraternal organization's voice was limited, which led Fernando to feel his group was not as important to the university.

Lack of cultural representation. Mark highlighted his frustration when he researched his HBCU and did not see Latinx students represented in campus publications or websites. He wanted his school to include more Latinx students in its print and online presence to recognize the diversity on campus. He stated,

"I'm not trying to change the school or nothing like that, you know, because I still want it to be an HBCU, you know, I'm really proud of that, that it's an HBCU, but, um, you know, just to put more familiar faces on there."

Mark asserted that he was "proud" to be attending a HBCU because of its dynamics. He felt comfortable with the way the school was organized in terms of its racial and cultural representations. However, his wish was that the school should make it more evident to its constituents and prospective students that this place was serving Latinx students as well.

Another participant, Greg, expressed his desire to see more representation of Latinx students in campus-wide events. For example, Greg suggested the HBCU host events to recognize Hispanic culture on-campus. He said,

"I know we have like a big emphasis like on Black History Month and MLK Day, obviously because we're a Black university...At the same time, I wouldn't mind seeing maybe a week dedicated to Hispanic Week or something like that."

Even though Greg recognized the importance of celebrating events honored by African American students because he was on an HBCU campus, he also realized that it was time the institution dedicated occasions to specifically celebrate Hispanic history and culture since this ethnic group gained significant representation on campus.

Finally, Abe wished to see Latinx students more integrated in the whole college culture. He recalled rarely seeing "anything, like, just for the Latinos." Abe recognized his institution did make attempts to incorporate Latinx students into the greater campus community; however, he was concerned Latinx students were not as prominent as African American students. Abe had prior experience with African American students, but he perceived cultural campus programming as an opportunity "that would actually help, you know, with the other (Latinx) students that are going to this school."

Work responsibilities. Five of the participants had off-campus employment, which limited their on-campus engagement and proved to be a key obstacle in fostering a sense of belonging. Instead of living on campus or participating in on-campus events, these Latino males commuted to campus to fulfill their academic responsibilities. For example, Peter shared he was offered the op-

portunity to live in an on-campus residence hall, but his work commitments prevented him from accepting the housing assignment. He explained,

They gave me a dorm but, I don't know. It just, it's hard because I have two jobs and my, one of my jobs is in North (City) and the other one is in Downtown (City). It's really hard for me to be commuting every day, and it's going to cost me too much money.

In an effort to save money and time, Peter decided to live at home with his immediate family, which prevented him from living on-campus and becoming fully immersed in the campus culture and environment.

The students' work responsibilities directly affected their academic engagement. Fernando was "always working," which limited his ability to thoughtfully complete his coursework. He shared, "I don't really have the time to be studying so whatever's turned in, I gotta do like two hours before." Fernando explained his decision to maintain multiple positions in order to financially contribute to his family because his dad lost his job. He said, "At that point, I was like, I'm ready go to home and help my family. I didn't know how, but, you know, I had to find a way." Thus, his work requirements also limited his ability to fully engage his faculty members or coursework.

Confronted with the pressure to financially support or contribute to their family, Latino males in this study acquired one or more off-campus jobs. These positions paid more than on-campus employment, but they drew Latino males away from campus, thereby disrupting opportunities to connect with peers and professors, which could foster a sense of belonging.

Discussion

The findings of this study build on the limited knowledge that exists about the experiences of Latino males at HBCUs. More specifically, the findings address the particular academic, social, and financial aspects of developing a sense of belonging through the eyes of Latino males navigating the HBCU environment. By centering the perceptions of Latino males within this context, we are able to better understand their experiences and what they perceive could help or hinder their sense of belonging at HBCUs.

First, on an academic level, the participants expressed positive experiences with faculty. The dedication of their faculty enabled the participants to feel like they mattered to the institution and that their learning was a priority for faculty. This finding builds upon prior research highlighting the learning community offered by HBCUs (Allen, 1992; Allen, 2016; Berger & Milem, 2000; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010). While this study offered a qualitative perspective on Latino males' interactions with faculty members, future studies should quantitatively examine their insights for generalizable findings across HBCUs. The student-faculty interactions Latino males experienced at an HBCU campus created avenues for participants to initiate help-seeking behaviors. This finding distinguishes the experiences of Latino males at HBCUs from previous research that found Latino males' expressions of pride and fear prevented them from seeking academic support (Saenz, Bukoski, Lu, & Rodriguez, 2013). HBCU faculty and student affairs professions can make effort to educate Latinx students about academic-support services available on campus and encourage their utilization of the services upon their initial arrival. Future research can explore the help-seeking patterns of Latino males at other HBCUs to further understand their approach to coursework and relationships with faculty members. In addition, quantitative studies examining faculty-student interactions can offer generalizable strategies and approaches to engaging Latino male students at HBCUs.

Socially, the participants described mixed feelings about their interactions with African American peers, both individually and within group settings. On one hand, participants felt that the HBCU environment was friendly and welcoming. A few participants also shared that cross-racial

interactions were a welcomed opportunity since they anticipated college would create avenues for interacting with diverse peers. The HBCU environment, according to them, welcomed and valued diverse ethnic backgrounds and helped them to feel comfortable on campus. On the other hand, some participants felt that student organizations themselves sometimes encouraged segregation from their African American peers. This finding is compelling participants already felt a sense of belonging due to HBCU's friendly environment and being involved in co-curricular activities (e.g., Maestas, Vasquez, & Zehr, 2007), but they also wished that there could be increased interaction with their African American peers on campus. This relates back to the effect that social identities can have on sense of belonging, another core element presented by Strayhorn (2012). As a result, HBCU student affairs staff can consider organizing formal and informal events that celebrate racial and cultural diversity and promote inter-racial/cultural communications. Future research should examine cross-cultural interactions between African American and Latino male students, in particular, and the larger campus community, in general.

Finally, financial support also proved to be a challenge for Latino males in this study. Similar to prior research highlighting cultural norms and expectations of Latino males to work (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008), this study found a number of the participants were faced with the burden of needing to financially support or contribute to their family's expenses. These responsibilities were particularly challenging for those who also had to commute every day to campus, and they were further confounded when students had more than one job. Because of their limited time on campus, participants were negatively influenced. To help Latino males overcome this obstacle to sense of belonging, HBCUs can create and/or extend opportunities for on-campus employment and integrate into academic program such activities that connect Latino males to the institution while they are on campus for classes. Additional scholarly work should address the influence of financial aid, scholarships, grants, and work responsibilities on Latino male students and their perceptions of sense of belonging or persistence in college and also consider the institutional context (e.g., HBCU, PWI, or HSI).

Conclusion

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are in a unique position in history. Having educated African American students for over 100 years, they are on the cusp of change as a result of national demographic shifts. The emergence of more Latinx students presents opportunities for HBCUs to recruit diverse students, but these strategies will only prove successful if students persist towards their degree. Degree completion is particularly compelling for Latino males, as they remain among the most underrepresented student populations in higher education. This study offers insight into how Latino male students perceive their role on two HBCU campuses and offers potential strategies for HBCUs to help increase the sense of belonging felt by these men. Increasing the sense of belonging for Latino males on HBCU campuses should lead to a variety of positive outcomes for these students and reinforce a mutually beneficial relationship between these vital institutions of higher education and an emerging student population.

Taryn Ozuna Allen, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Ashley N. Stone, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration at The George Washington University.

Robert T. Palmer, Ph.D., is Chair and Associate Professor for the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the School of Education at Howard University.

Dina C. Maramba, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Higher Education in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University.

Trang Dinh, Ph.D., is currently a postdoctoral fellow working in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Victor B. Sáenz, Ph.D., is Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at The University of Texas at Austin. He is an Associate Professor in the Program in Higher Education Leadership and a Fellow in the Sid W. Richardson Regents Chair in Community College Leadership. He also holds courtesy appointments with the UT Center for Mexican American Studies and the Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies.

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