

**Title**

Putting the 'Afro' in Latinidad: Interactive Symposium on Past, Present, and Future of AfroLatine/a/o Scholarship

**Abstract**

This session will feature a panel of scholars, from a variety of disciplines, sharing their research related to AfroLatinidad. This interactive symposium will facilitate a discussion on AfroLatine/a/o racial/ethnic identity development, how AfroLatine/a/os challenge dominant ideologies, and how Latine/a/o research can be inclusive of AfroLatine/a/os.

**Proposal Text**

Literature Review:

Latinx/a/os are diverse, vibrant, and resilient people whose cultural traditions, ancestry, histories, music, food, immigration stories, beliefs, values, and phenotypes vary. Despite this, the United States (U.S.) government has designated several labels to describe individuals from Latin American living in the U.S.; thus grouping them into an ethnic population termed: Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish. According to the United States Census results, the Hispanic or Latino population was estimated to be 62.1 million in 2020 (Jones et al., 2021). Mirroring the increase in the Latine population, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports an increase in college enrollment rates for Latine students (Hussar et al., 2020). The category Hispanic/Latino is a pan-ethnic group because of the consolidation of communities based on ethnic and national identities (McConnell & Delgado, 2004). AfroLatine/a/os, those who identify with their African ancestry and Latine roots, are often rendered invisible by the monolithic label Latine/a/o (García-Louis & Cortes, 2020; Daché et al., 2019; McConnell & Delgado, 2004). There is an erasure of AfroLatine/a/o students in higher education which is caused by white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and limiting definitions of Latinidad (García Reyes, 2021). AfroLatine/a/o students are rendered invisible by how institutions lack accounting for AfroLatine/a/os in their data.

AfroLatinidad is not a new concept but an identity Latine/a/o people have increasingly embraced first in Latin America and then in the United States. AfroLatine/a/os are simultaneously ethnically Latino and racially Black and have visible or self-identified African ancestry (Daché et al., 2019; Haywood, 2017; Hernández, 2022; Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010; Salas Pujols, 2020; Vega et al., 2012). AfroLatine/a/os assert agency in identifying with AfroLatinidad. Some scholars call this racial and ethnic identity development process a "me-search" journey, a reconciliation of their ethnoracial dissonance, Afro-consciousness, or triple-consciousness (Flores & Jiménez Román, 2009; García-Louis, 2016; 2020; 2021; Haywood, 2016; Hordge-Freeman & Veras, 2019). AfroLatine/a/os racial and ethnic identity development journey involves undergoing a psychosocial awakening in which they "unlearn colorist, prejudiced, and demeaning messaging about Blackness while simultaneously

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learning how to embrace their AfroLatinidad" (García-Louis, 2021, p.101). Latine/a/os can identify with any race, many Latine/a/os of darker skin tone are undoubtedly discriminated against and racialized as nonwhite (Newby & Dowling, 2007). AfroLatine/a/os experience intragroup colorism, social exclusion, microaggressions, and discrimination because of their race, phenotype, skin tone, and hair texture, in addition to experiencing anti-Black sentiments (Daché et al., 2019; García-Louis & Cortes, 2020, Haywood, 2017; Hordge-Freeman & Veras, 2019).

#### Theoretical Framework:

The panelists will utilize the AfroLatina Theory of Black-imiento to guide the panel discussion. AfroLatina Theory of Blackimiento was recently published by Daché, Haywood, and Mislán, (2019) which focuses on some of the aforementioned gaps in LatCrit. It has three tenets: Black anti-racist aesthetics, AfroLatine historical consciousness, and the rejection of a Pan-ethnic racialized Latine label (Daché et al., 2019). The first tenet calls out eurocentric ideologies within Latine culture and its impact on Blackness within Latinidad (Daché et al., 2019). It also calls out colorism and racism within the Black and Latine communities that challenge ethnic/racial authenticity based on phenotype and hair type (Daché et al., 2019). The second tenet AfroLatine historical consciousness centers AfroLatine scholarship within Black transnationalism (Daché et al., 2019). It calls for historical consciousness in the Black struggle for liberation that crosses borders around the world (Daché et al., 2019). It emphasizes the importance of solidarity within Pan-Africa that reclaims the history of Black descendants of slavery (Daché et al., 2019). The last tenet, the rejection of a Pan-ethnic racialized Latine label, challenges how White supremacy affords privileges to White passing Latine (Daché et al., 2019). An example of this is the murders of Trayvon Martin and Philando Castile by White passing Latines (Daché et al., 2019). It calls out the homogenization of the term Latine and centers the African and Black experiences within Latinidad (Daché et al., 2019). Considering these tenets, the panelists anticipate that examining the ethnic/racial identity development and sense of belonging in higher education for AfroLatines through the AfroLatina Theory of Black-imiento could provide insight that contributes to existing and future scholarship.

#### Session Objectives:

With a wide-range of scholars, from a variety of disciplines, this symposium will describe the past, current, and future literature on AfroLatinidad. This symposium will utilize Daché et al.'s (2019) Black-imiento theory within this interactive symposium to:

Racial and Ethnic Identity Development: understand the literature on the racial and ethnic identity of AfroLatine/a/os and their lived experiences in the United States.

Challenging White/Eurocentric Ideologies: discuss how AfroLatine/a/os challenge white/eurocentric ideologies by embracing AfroLatinidad.

Impact on Higher Education: strategize ways in which higher education administrators and faculty can foster a sense of belonging for AfroLatine/a/o students. In addition, attendees will brainstorm ways in which Latinx research can be inclusive of AfroLatine/a/os.

#### Symposium Agenda:

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Welcome & Overview of Symposium (5 mins): Organizer and moderator (Marinel Martinez-Benyarko) will welcome attendees, introduce panelists, review objectives, and provide an overview of the session agenda.

Overview of Panelist Research (30 mins): Starting with Dr. Haywood, who will introduce their Black-imiento theory as well as insights on their research on AfroLatine/a/os. Following, the moderator will ask Dr. Claudia García-Louis, Dr. Natalie Muñoz, and Dr. Ishara Casellas Connors. Lastly, the moderator and organizer will share her scholarship on AfroLatine/a/o activists. Each presentation of research will be timed at 5 minutes each.

Audience Discussion (20 mins): The moderator will ask attendees to utilize the following guiding questions to guide their small group discussions:

Within Latine, Ethnic, or Black Studies, how have AfroLatine/a/s been invisibilized or centered? How can Latine/a/o research be inclusive of AfroLatine/a/os?

With possible revisions to the U.S. Census survey regarding the questions on race and ethnicity, possibly merging the questions, what are the implications for research and practice if this new protocol is implemented?

How can we use a strengths-based theory, like Black-imiento, to acknowledge the resistance and agency that AfroLatine/a/os possess; especially as they challenge dominant ideologies? What strategies can higher education administrators and faculty implement to foster a sense of belonging for AfroLatine/a/o students?

Large Group Share Out (15 mins): The moderator will ask 3-4 small groups to share out on the different guiding questions proposed.

Closing Remarks and Gratitude (5 mins): Moderator will thank panelist scholars and symposium attendees for participating in this session and the valuable work they engage in, by advancing AfroLatinidad literature and scholarship.

Presenter Backgrounds & Expertise: This interactive symposium brings together scholars from a diversity of research professions to discuss the AfroLatine/a/o community. Panelists comprise of scholars across philanthropy think tanks, research-focused faculty, and doctoral students and candidates all studying AfroLatinidad

Marinel Martinez-Benyarko (moderator and panelist): Marinel is an AfroDominicana doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her research centers on AfroLatinx/a/o identity development, student activism, and critical consciousness. Her dissertation uses plática as a methodological approach which provides space for AfroLatinx/a/o activists to reflect on their socialization, lived experiences, racial/ ethnic identity, and activism through collaboration and community building.

Dr. Natalie Muñoz (panelist): Dr. Natalie Muñoz is an Assistant Professor at Rutgers University - Newark in the School of Social Work. She is a 3rd generation Afro-Latina with heritage from Dominican Republic and Cuba. Her scholarship is interdisciplinary and encompasses Higher Education, Social Work, and Afro-Latine history. Her most recent research seeks to understand how HBCUs contribute to the ethnic and racial identity and mental health of Afro-Latine college students.

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Dr. Claudia García-Louis (panelist): Dr. García-Louis is an associate professor at the University of Texas – San Antonio in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department. She is a Mexican immigrant, LatinaMamiScholar, and former first-in-family and first-generation college student. Her scholarship is interdisciplinary in nature as she engages topics of Latinidad, LatinX identity development, education equity, culture, race, and ethnic identity development. Her research centers on disrupting the racialization and homogenization of the U.S. LatinX population by underscoring intragroup racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

Dr. Jasmine Haywood (panelist): Jasmine Haywood, Ph.D., is a strategy director at Lumina Foundation. In that role, she leads a portfolio of work that focuses on increasing student success outcomes at four-year institutions. Dr. Haywood has published peer-reviewed scholarship that unveils how Afro-Latinx college students experience anti-Black Latino racism. Her dissertation, titled “Triple Consciousness”, focused on the racialized experiences of Afro-Latinx collegians. Dr. Haywood has been featured in various media outlets as an expert on anti-Black Latino racism such as NBC, Univision, The Atlantic, Vox, and Inside Philanthropy.

Dr. Ishara Casellas Connors (panelist): Ishara Casellas Connors, PhD, is an assistant professor of Public Service and Administration at Texas A&M University. Her research examines issues related to racial equity in U.S. higher education policy and practice. She considers these questions across several facets of higher education including, Hispanic Serving Institutions, displaced learners, and Afro-Latinx students. She considers the implications of state and institutional policy for advancing racial equity for minoritized students.

#### Significance:

The significance and power in this panel discussion is that it seeks to tell the stories of a minority within a minority on college campuses (Nubia-Feliciano, 2016). From a social justice perspective, it is critical that we begin to carve space in history, curriculum, theory, and research to include the rich and diverse experiences of AfroLatine/a/o students. There is power in acknowledging and affirming the experiences of AfroLatine/a/o students on college campuses as it puts an end to the homogenization of the Latine/a/o population. Such a call for action recognizes that “Latines are racially White, Black, indigenous, Asian, and multiracial” and their varying experiences matter (Zerquera et al., 2020). The AfroLatine college student experience should be a time for self-discovery, intellectual liberation, and positive ethnic/racial identity development. Until AfroLatine/a/o students can see themselves represented on campus they will continue to have challenges adjusting to university life (Francis et al., 2019 as cited in García-Louis & Cortes, 2020).