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"Cops Only See the Brown Skin, They Could Care Less Where It Originated": Afro-Latinx Perceptions of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement

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Abstract

The increasing visibility of Afro-Latinxs in the United States has catalyzed interest among researchers about this group's unique experiences of racialization. However, much less attention has been given to the relationship between Afro-Latinx identity formation and perceptions and/or participation in social movements. Drawing on web-based survey data with 115 Afro-Latinxs, we examine how Afro-Latinxs view the Black Lives Matter Movement with a focus on the extent to which they perceive that this explicitly anti-racist movement is relevant to their own lives. We theoretically ground our analysis in research related to collective identity and group consciousness to explore how Afro-Latinxs' unique understanding of their ethno-racial identity and group position impacts their participation in the movement. We find that overwhelmingly Afro-Latinx respondents believe they should participate in Black Lives Matter, but how they articulate their support sheds light on the diverse ways they position themselves vis-à-vis other Black-identified groups in the racial hierarchy.

Keywords

racial and ethnic minorities, Latina/o sociology, race, gender, class, Afro-Latinx, collective behavior and social movements

Introduction

On September 17, 2019 at a southeastern university in the United States, Ray Santana presented a riveting account of his wrongful conviction as part of the Central Park Five. Previous accounts of the Exonerated Five had emphasized Santana's Afro-Latinx background and, in particular, how his paternal grandmother's inability to speak English disadvantaged him in interactions with the police. (It was she who accompanied him to the police station to give his statement, and it is argued that because she spoke Spanish, she did not have a clear understanding of what was happening). Yet, Santana never mentioned the significance of his Latinx ethnicity as part of his

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narrative—a fact made even more striking considering his invitation was sponsored as part of the university's Hispanic Heritage month. Santana did, however, highlight his Black racial identity, citing the significance of growing up with Black friends and reading literary works such as the Autobiography of Malcolm X as motivating factors for his activism. Santana's decision to center his Blackness rather than his Latinx background in his activism raises important questions about how other Afro-Latinxs understand and express this identity in race-based social movements. In this study, we explore the extent to which Afro-Latinxs see their ethnoracial identities as compatible with calls for racial solidarity in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. We argue that Afro-Latinxs have diverse understandings of their Blackness and the extent to which they express a "diasporic consciousness" shapes both their likelihood of participating in Black Lives Matter (BLM) and their justifications for why they decide to do so.

Santana's experience of being wrongfully accused and other narratives like his about systemic injustices are relevant to this study because they are what spurred the development of the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Garza 2014; Taylor 2016). More specifically, the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the death of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American in Sanford, Florida was the event that catalyzed the creation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In its nascent phase, co-founders Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi envisioned that the organization would serve as an "ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" (Garza 2014:23). To that end, this movement has helped promote visibility of police brutality including those cases involving the deaths of Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Mya Hall, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, among many others. Since 2013, the group has leveraged the power of social media and has been especially attractive to young people in 40 chapters worldwide.

Given the considerable ethnic diversity among the Black population in the United States, our analysis focuses on how individuals who identify as Afro-Latinx perceive the relevance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement to their own lives and the lives of other Afro-Latinxs. For the purposes of this study, we define Afro-Latinxs as "people of visible or self-identified African heritage who trace their heritage to Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking Latin America" (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020:146). Our focus on self-identified Afro-Latinxs, women in particular, is significant for several reasons. Historically, researchers have portrayed a mainly contentious relationship between Latinxs and Blacks in the United States (Bobo et al. 1994; Kaufmann 2003; Mindiola, Niemann, and Rodriguez 2009; Sanchez 2008; Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel 1989). Not only is this lens not representative of the complexities of this relationship, but in their narrow categorical constructions, the categories of Latinx and Black are often framed as mutually exclusive (See Garcia 2000; Hope, Keels, and Durkee 2016). Second, the emergence of "Afro-Latinx feminisms" reflects the urgency to explore how embodied experiences of race and racialization shape political consciousness, self-identity, and the possibilities of transnational racial solidarity, especially for women (Clealand 2019; Rivera 2006; Valle 2019; Zamora 2020; Zamora and Ramirez 2017). Traditionally, studies on Afro-Latinxs have highlighted the challenges faced in the context of families and within the Latinx community wherein blackness is devalued and stigmatized (Comas-Díaz 1994; Cruz-Janzen 2001). We build on this work, but we situate it as part of the contemporary push to emphasize how Afro-Latinxs exert agency by re-educating themselves and constructing Black-affirming communities and new epistemologies (Dache, Haywood, and Mislán 2019; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020; Langford and Speight 2015; Johnson and Nuñez 2015; Paschel 2016; Rivera-Rideau, Jones, and Paschel 2016).

As the Pew Research report notes that 25 percent of all Latinxs identify as Afro-Latinx, the political shifts and leanings of this group will be significant to the future of political and social activity in the United States (Pew Research Center 2016). By examining Afro-Latinx perceptions of BLM and analyzing the justifications for their views, this analysis provides insight into how this group may align itself in the future, both including and beyond political alliances. From a

sociological perspective, this research reiterates the distinction between racial categorization and racial identity and contributes to research and theorizations that attempt to bring critical race scholars and immigration scholars into dialogue (Aranda 2017; Golash-Boza 2015; Romero 2008). Ultimately, we argue that Afro-Latinxs articulate the relevance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in markedly diverse ways which is a reflection of their variegated understandings of their position within the African Diaspora and their particular understandings of race. Notwithstanding, the overall support that Afro-Latinxs express toward BLM illustrates that, despite the sometimes contradictory ways that they conceptualize race and blackness, they (as other Black immigrants before them) have found common ground on which to organize politically (Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005; Smith 2013; 2014).

Background

Racial Identity and Protest in the United States

Before delving into Afro-Latinxs' perceptions of the BlackLivesMatter movement, it is essential to first acknowledge the historical roots of Black mobilization against racism and social injustice in the United States from which it arose (Franklin and Higginbotham 2011). For African Americans, who are descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States, these mobilizations began before their ancestors even reached the United States. This resistance took the form of rebellions, mass suicides, and revolts on slave ships transporting them to the New World (McGowan 1990; Richardson 2001; Sale 1997). Once in the United States, enslaved Africans from different countries, different tribes, and different dialects, though forced into contact, leveraged their codified subjugation in ways that led to the development of black culture and provided the labor for the global emergence of the United States (Berlin 2009). Early anti-racist struggles during slavery, represented resistance in a formidable context, and this resilience has powered Black Americans through slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow segregation, the War on poverty, mass incarceration, and much more (Hall 2005; Marable 2007; Tate 1998).

While the legacy of Black resistance to white supremacy and racism persists within the context of BlackLivesMatter, what has changed considerably over time has been the Black population in the United States. No longer exclusively comprised African Americans who are descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States, contemporary immigration policy has significantly impacted the face of blackness (Dawson 2003; Smith 2014). Since the 1960s, the United States removed the barriers of entry for Black Diasporic populations and, as a result, has witnessed a dramatic increase in Black immigrants and growth in the Black multiracial/ethnic population. These groups challenged traditional ideas about what it means to be culturally Black and led to diverse encounters that have been simultaneously communal, contentious, and constructive (Bean and Bell-Rose1999; Berlin 2010; Lee and Bean 2007). Even as the face of Blackness shifts, much of social movements scholarship still homogenizes Black political attitudes and participation within the United States (Bunyasi and Smith 2019).

Socialization and Identity among Native and Immigrant Blacks

To better contextualize the existing heterogeneity of Black political attitudes and engagement within the United States, we must unpack the experiences and practices of Black immigrants in the United States, and Afro-Latinxs, in particular. Some of the most prolific research about Black immigrants has focused on West Indian and African immigrants, highlighting the ways that these groups act to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes associated with African Americans. These distancing strategies have included the use of accents, certain names, references to their immigrant origins, and use of disparaging comments that rely on stereotypes of

African Americans as lazy and "ghetto" (Waters 1990, 1999). Their efforts to make ethnic distinctions often reinforce anti-African American sentiments and have been the source of intragroup resentment and fragmentation. Yet, despite these challenges, Black immigrants have, at strategic moments, also engaged in racial solidarity, inter-marriage, shared social spaces and, more importantly, forged common political alliances against racism (Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005; Smith 2014).

Afro-Latinxs' perceptions of the BlackLivesMatter movement are particularly significant because, unlike other Black immigrant groups, they are less likely to identify as Black. In fact, those who identify as Afro-Latinx were more likely to racially identify as white, with only 18 percent identifying as Black (López and Gonzalez-Barrera 2016; Parker et al. 2015). This observed disconnect traces its roots to Latin American colonial history, specifically, to the fact that most countries in Latin America developed white supremacist "racial projects" that stigmatized and exploited Blackness (Andrews 2004; García-Peña 2016; Wade 1997). Emblematic of national calls to "mejorar la raza" or "better the race" via racial mixing and intermarriage, whitening efforts across Latin America were in some cases advanced by the state-supported immigration of Europeans (Andrews 2004; Duany 2006). Even now, ideologies of whitening ("blanqueamiento" or "branqueamento") continue to shape the stigmatization of Blackness, impacting how African descendants from these regions identify racially (Andrews 2004; Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005; Telles 2014; Wade 1997). Therefore, by definition, our focus on individuals who identify as Afro-Latinx isolates a segment of this population that possesses an elevated level of Black racial consciousness.

At the same time that we highlight these general tendencies across Latin America, we are also mindful that there are national differences that have a significant impact not only on who is characterized as Black but also the meaning attributed to Blackness (Paschel 2016; Telles 2014; Wood, Ribeiro, and Hamsho-Diaz 2010). For Afro-Latinxs who trace their heritage to the Andean regions of Latin America (such as Peru, Ecuador, and Honduras) with larger indigenous populations, their understanding and experience of Blackness differs from those who may trace their origins to countries in Latin America with a large African-descendant population (Golash-Boza 2011; Wade 1997). Beyond their experiences, as Lorgia García-Peña (2016) notes, the power of personal biography and framings of histories play a significant role in shaping the tensions between national identity and one's personal experience and understanding of blackness. Evidence suggests that Afro-Latinxs raised in the United States may experience socialization that comprised anti-Black or mixed-messages related to their "black" racial features, pressures to emphasize or downplay elements of their Black racial identity, and challenges to their authentic *Latinidade* by white Latinxs and by African Americans (Dache et al. 2019; Haywood 2017; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020). These same aforementioned studies also emphasize how exposure to information about the African Diaspora and, as well, Afro-Latinxs' embeddedness within (virtual and in-person) communities that affirm their African heritage may provide the context for which more politicized Afro-Latinx identities can emerge (Paschel 2016; Rivera-Rideau et al. 2016). What remains uncertain is how Afro-Latinxs understand and articulate their motivations for participating in race-based political movements and to what extent they connect their positions to a sense of collective identity and/or consciousness that could have broader political implications.

Theoretical Framework

From "Me" to 'We': Identity, Consciousness, and Mobilization

Our central concern is related to Afro-Latinxs' understanding of blackness and the extent to which their ethnoracial identity impacts their participation in and understanding of race-based

social movements such as BLM. Scholars consistently find collective identity to be a central concept related to nearly every aspect of contemporary social movements (Hunt and Benford 2004). For our purposes, collective identity reflects an individual's group identification, more specifically, their psychological feelings of belonging or attachment to a particular group (Smith 2013; 2014). Thus, collective identity denotes a mutual sense of "we-ness" and "collective agency," among social movement participants (Snow and McAdam 2000). Because research demonstrates that stronger and more salient collective identities facilitate greater movement participation and mobilization (Johnston, Larana, and Gusfield 1994; Klanderman and de Weerd 2000), we theoretically ground our analysis in research related to collective identity and group consciousness, relative to the identity-to-politics link.

In her ground-breaking work *Black Mosaic*, Candis Watts Smith (2014) moves beyond the rhetoric of Black Diasporic unity to examine how what it means to be a Black American has changed over time and how these changes are consequential for political attitudes, beliefs, and notions of Black consciousness. Focusing on racial group consciousness, Smith (2014) finds that Black consciousness is the primary link between Black identity and collective political action. This is reflected by the "relative homogeneity" and unity of Black American political attitudes and behaviors (i.e., partisanship, voting, policy support, etc.) identified over decades of empirical research (Dawson 1995; McClain and Stewart 2001; Shingles 1981). We draw on Candis Smith's (2014) notion of "diasporic consciousness" as the theoretical grounding of our analysis on Afro-Latinxs. Embracing blackness as a pan-ethnic identity, Smith's (2014:46) theory of *diasporic consciousness* allows us to better account for the complexities and nuances of Black political attitudes and behavior, amidst growing ethnic diversity. Diasporic consciousness is defined as:

> the (mental) tightrope that people of African descent who live in the U.S. walk as they try to balance their superordinate racial identity (and the political interests associated with it) with their subgroup or ethnic identity and its closely associated political interests. (Smith 2014:7)

Coinciding with Smith's (2014) work, our application of diasporic consciousness relies on linked fate, a sense that the well-being of the group is closely linked or associated with the well-being of the individual, as a primary measure for consciousness (McClain et al. 2009; Sanchez and Vargas 2016). Linked fate is explicitly connected to racial group consciousness through Michael Dawson's (1995) black utility heuristic theory, which "predicts that as long as Blacks perceive that their individual life chances are inextricably linked to other group members, they are likely to incorporate their racial group's well-being into their political decision-making calculus" (Bunyasi and Smith 2019:181). Important here, and consistent with other research, one's consciousness is typically associated with their direct ties to the collective (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016).

In our examination, we focus on the relationship between Afro-Latinxs' ethnoracial identity and their corresponding perceptions and/or participation in #BlackLivesMatter. We highlight how Afro-Latinx respondents position themselves and their political interests within a Black collective, which reveals if and how linked fate and diasporic consciousness influence their perceptions of the #BLM movement. Afro-Latinxs disrupt the boundaries of both a Latinx ethnicity and Black racial identity and are thus pulled in historically contentious directions: "that of the nationality or Latino panethnicity, and that of blackness and the realities of US African American life" (Flores and Román 2009:326). As ethnoracial minorities, Afro-Latinxs occupy precarious "in-between" social locations, forced to simultaneously negotiate ethnic and racial identities within a sociopolitical climate that has long erased or deemed those identities as incompatible (Aranda and Rebollo-Gil 2004). Highlighting these complexities and tensions, as well as the role of physical appearance and phenotype in the boundary work and group identification of Afro-Latinxs, Hordge-Freeman and Veras (2020) use the term *ethnoracial dissonance* to illustrate "how Afro-Latinxs experience the

contradictions of national, ideological, and micro-level processes that promote a prototypical Latinx appearance and ethnic pride, simultaneously alongside the stigmatization of Blackness" (150). Ultimately, we draw from Smith's (2014) *Black Mosaic* to conceptualize Blackness as a multilayered, fluid, and contextual pan-ethnic identity, which may garner salience for Afro-Latinxs through racial consciousness, racialized experiences, and collective action.

Methodology

We collected Web-based survey data (including several open-ended questions) from 115 Afro-Latinxs, of whom 10 participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Our analysis focuses largely on the qualitative survey though the phone interviews were useful in contextualizing some of the answers provided in the short answers. We targeted participants who self-identified as Afro-Latinx and were at least 18 years of age. As the label Afro-Latinx is still a relatively new concept, we determined that social media would be the best way to access this population. We disseminated the study online by using platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram with keyword searches including Afro-Latino, Afro-Latina, and Afro-Latinx. We also created Twitter and Instagram accounts which allowed us to correspond with web page administrators who then posted our recruitment flyer for their followers to access. In order to diversify the pool as much as possible, we targeted multiple online pages with different audiences. Our data do not include individuals who are inactive online, but they, nonetheless, offer an opportunity for us to contribute to theory-building as it relates to Afro-Latinx identity and political mobilization.

In our sample, women and heterosexuals were overrepresented, accounting for 91 and 79.5 percent of our participants, respectively. Most respondents were born in the United States (79 percent) and spent their entire lives in the United States (80.6 percent). In response to our open-ended question about race, 61.7 percent identified as black and 19.7 percent as mixed race. Asking about race and ethnicity separately, we found that, with regard to ethnicity, 38 percent reported Latinx/Hispanic, while 38 percent reported their ethnicity on their country of origin. Finally, 85 percent of the sample was younger than 44 years, and 60 percent reported incomes of less than $35,000. Our respondents are a highly-educated population including more than 80 percent who reported being currently in college and/or having earned a college degree. With regards to nationality, over 40 percent of our respondents report family ties to Puerto Rico (13.8 percent) and the Dominican Republic (28.7 percent) with the remaining respondents reporting parentage from more than 20 different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Previous studies on Afro-Latinx identity note that Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are the most likely of all Latinxs to identify as Black, which may partially explain their statistical representation in our study (Duany 1998; Logan 2003).

In order to analyze Afro-Latinxs' perceptions of BLM, we primarily examined how Afro-Latinxs responded to the question: "Should Afro-Latinos participate in the #BlackLivesMatter Movement? Why or why not?" Understanding the importance of connecting Afro-Latinx identity, racial politics, and socialization, we also integrated their responses to other survey questions about identity and socialization including: "Please share some of your earliest memories that shaped your identity as Afro-Latino/a?," "How would you define what it means to be "Afro-Latino/a," and Why is this term [Afro-Latino/a] important?." The initial analysis of data involved close readings and manual open-coding of the survey responses to determine the most salient themes and concepts which were then compared and triangulated across interviewees using a comparative process. Our initial coding yielded processual codes such as "Racial Distancing" and "Minimizing Ethnic Differences," as well as pattern codes such as "'We' Black People'" compared with "'Those' Black People." After identifying thematic patterns, we analyzed the relationship between factors such as neighborhood composition, early socialization, and family dynamics to explore how these considerations impacted the results.

Our results have been organized in three sections that reflect the major patterns related to how participants viewed Afro-Latinx participation in the movement ranging from full support, indifference, and opposition. While our decision to organize our results in three categories may carry the suggestion that respondents fit neatly into discrete categories, respondents often vacillated in offering responses that sometimes spanned all three categories. This three-tiered structure allows us to highlight the most common frames, but we intentionally discuss the implications of respondents' overlapping responses and the diversity within these categories.

Results

Political Involvement and Boundaries of Blackness

Overwhelmingly, respondents supported Afro-Latinxs' participation in the BLM Movement, with 70 percent voicing support. In this first section, we analyze respondents' responses with attention to what the content of their justifications reveal about their ethno-racial identities, engagement in boundary work, and the extent to which their responses engage with notions of linked-fate and diasporic consciousness. For one segment of BLM supporters, they justified their affirmative response *mainly* (though not exclusively) on the basis of commonsense understandings of diasporic history, geography, and language. For example, Sara (Puerto Rican) asserts,

> Yes! Many people don't believe that Afro-Latinx share the same history and experiences as many of the Africans Americans. Besides language, Afro-Latinx and African Americans are the same. We are just Black people in different locations yet we face the same racial inequality. It's important that more people start seeing that and giving support where needed because our lives are being affected.

This respondent understands the history of Afro-Latinxs and African Americans to be identical, and moreover, she constructs Afro-Latinxs and African Americans as part of one larger Black diasporic group. In addition to affirming that Afro-Latinxs should participate in the movement, she makes a broader appeal that "more people" (irrespective of race or ethnicity) need to both recognize and show solidarity with the movement.

Sara attributes her identity and racial consciousness, in part, to her prolonged exposure to anti-Blackness and her experience of being the "negra" within her largely white passing Latinx family. Her use of "our lives" reveals her linked-fate and attachment with the African American community which she explains emerged through her peer groups and neighborhood dynamics:

> I feel more closely to African-Americans because I was raised and grew up around them more. In addition, my parents didn't raise me in a traditionally Hispanic household. I share more of the same childhood and experiences as African-Americans.

Sara's embeddedness within communities that normalize Blackness, her childhood socialization, and exposure to transgressive messages about Black identity promote a sense of linked fate and diasporic consciousness that politicizes her Afro-Latinx identity.

Representative of other respondents who supported Afro-Latinx participation in the BLM movement based on "common sense" ideas of Blackness and diaspora, Cristina from the Dominican Republic elaborated her views about the significance of geography and language in her justification of Afro-Latinxs' involvement in BLM. She states,

> . . . the term Afro-Latino is just a term to describe or geographically identify a group of African or black people, so basically, you're still talking about Black people who speak Spanish or have an ethnically Hispanic background. But, regardless of race, nationality or ethnicity, I strongly believe

> that we all should support #BlackLivesMatter movement. Afro-Latinos especially, since we have a double chance to be targeted: 1-Being Black; 2-Being Hispanic or Latino.

What is notable is that while both Cristina and Sara construct blackness as a category that includes Afro-Latinxs, their doing so is predicated on the minimization or erasure of ethnic differences. Afro-Latinx identity and culture are discounted as mere artifacts of geography rather than being attributed meaningful cultural significance. Cristina illustrates this further when she responds to a survey question about the significance of the term Afro-Latinx:

> . . . in the Latino community there's still some lack of education about our African heritage and ancestry. You can be both African and Latino, but never forget that Latino is more based on where the ship drop *(sic)* off our ancestors (Latin American, and Caribbean Islands) than in who we are (Africans) doesn't matter where we are or where we live.

Similar to Sara, Cristina's politicization and strong support for BLM is largely connected to her upbringing and racial socialization. But, rather than link this politicization to peer groups or the African American community (as Sara does), Cristina emphasized the significant role that her family, especially her black father, played in instilling and promoting a strong sense of Black racial pride and diasporic knowledge. A reflection of these complex understandings of race and ethnicity, Cristina believes that solidarity around Blackness supersedes ethnic difference, even as she simultaneously recognizes the "double disadvantage" of being *both* Black and Latinx (Aranda and Rebollo-Gil 2004).

"They Say, Therefore I am?": Social perceptions of Blackness and BLM

Within the group of those who support Afro-Latinxs' participation in BLM, several respondents framed their support of BLM by focusing on their familiarity with social perceptions of racial phenotype and racialization, rather than only because of their racial identity. Their awareness of the potential and negative impact of their "Black-looking" appearance was central to their justifications. As Anita (Panamanian) notes in her support of Afro-Latinxs participation in BLM:

> FREAKING YES MAN WE ARE BLACK!!! Even if we are latinos y latinas when society looks at us they see a black person nothing else. So, I think it really important to support and spread #BlackLivesMatter #BlackIsBeautiful because like man it's crazy how society stamps black people and disadvantages we get compared to other people.

Anita emphatically declares herself and other Afro-Latinxs as Black in her support of the movement. Furthermore, by integrating other hashtags in her reply, she connects the racial affirmation effort among Afro-Latinxs as part of a broader movement to counteract racist messages about Black inferiority. Ultimately, she affirms her Black racial identity as the reason for her support, but also justifies her views by focusing on the importance of society's perceptions to the experiences of Afro-Latinx.

Likewise, other respondents center the importance of racial perceptions and racial visibility in their reasons for why Afro-Latinxs should participate in BLM. They state,

> Yes! We are still people of color. At the end of the day I am still a black woman that speaks Spanish. If you would see me across the room *without me saying a word* you would identify me as black. So, yes, I do believe that Afro Latino[sic] should participate in black lives matter. (Natasha, Dominican)

> Yes! I think that no matter what language you speak, if you're black, you're black and society is going to see you as such. This being said, we should support the BLM movement because this is something that affects us too. (Victor, Venezuelan/Colombian)

Natasha engages in a type of boundary work that positions herself as "black" but also acknowledges that other Afro-Latinxs may identify as "people of color." And, at the same time, similar to Cristina and Sara, she notes that being a Spanish-speaker should not inhibit the formation of racial solidarities since people's narrow notions about a "Latino phenotype" means that their Spanish-speaking abilities do not translate into them being perceived as Latinx (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020; Quiros and Dawson 2013; Romo 2011).

Some respondents expressed more ambivalence about being *misperceived* as Black, and the frequency of these racial misperceptions compelled them to support BLM. Amayah, who is Dominican and racially identifies as mixed race, replies to the question about Afro-Latinx participation by stating,

> Yes, they should [support the movement]. Because whether you like it or not, not everyone will see you walking down the street and think, "Oh, they must be from Honduras." They'll think you're black, for the most part, and that's all. Also, if you marry a non-Hispanic Black person, your children will also be black and affected by the racial discrimination in this country and the world.

Amayah is aware of the hypervisibility of black people in public settings and cognizant that Afro-Latinxs are often racially indistinguishable from Black Americans, which is why she advocates for BLM participation. Her phrase "whether you like it or not" indicates the ambivalence with which some Afro-Latinxs may respond to being perceived as "black . . . and that's all." This ambivalence is an extension of the anti-Black racial socialization employed by her mother who she reveals accused her of "trying to be black" because of her predominately Black American peer group during childhood. Rejecting her mother's accusations, both her awareness that Afro-Latinxs are often positioned as Black in the U.S. alongside her understanding that one's racial position greatly shapes marital outcomes drive her comment about her marriage prospects and future children.

Other respondents who included justifications of Afro-Latinxs' participation in BLM did so by asserting their adoption of a Black racial identity and maintaining the relevance of their ethnic identities. These responses are best represented by these quotes:

> Yes. Although we are not African Americans, We are black. The government/community doesn't know or physically see the difference. (Nina, Mexican)

> Yes. Because racially we are black. We do not have the term "latino" on our foreheads. To the entire world we come off as simply black. (Claudia, Cuban/St. Lucian)

Both of the respondents place themselves within the collective Black group by stating, "We are Black." Unlike previous respondents, they do not assume sameness but rather have developed an understanding of racial identity that allows for their Black racial identity to coexist with ethnic differentiations between Afro-Latinxs from African Americans. In their terseness, both respondents rely on notions of diasporic consciousness and their awareness about how Afro-Latinxs are treated and perceived as part of the basis for their justifications for participation. And, indicative of the porosity of their categories, there are also traces of ambiguity in Claudia's reply, which echoed responses of other respondents who wanted to be identified as "more than Black." The corollary idea to this is that Black Americans or African Americans are "just black," which speaks to both the normalization of the Americanness of African Americans, as well as to their presumed monoracial ancestry. In this case, Claudia asserts a Black identity, but also indicates her desire for differentiation rather than sameness.

Overall, respondents in this category staunchly support Afro-Latinxs' involvement in the BLM movement. But, how they articulated their support for BLM varied considerably, providing insights into how they engage in ethno-racial boundary work. Some displayed a strong sense of

"diasporic consciousness" and engaged in boundary work that allowed them to support BLM based on notions of racial sameness and the minimization of ethnic differences such as nationality, language, and culture. Others based their unequivocal support on being perceived as physically indistinguishable from non-Hispanic Blacks in public settings, even while they maintain that there are important ethnic differences and they did not explicitly identify as black. The last group of respondents acknowledged the significance of other people's perceptions of their racial background, but they supported participation in the movement based on their racial identity without devaluing ethnic differences. Overall, respondents display different levels of diasporic consciousness, variable forms of boundary work, and diverse understandings of Blackness even as they all support Afro-Latinxs' participation in BLM movement.

Anti-racism versus Universal Appeals for #BlackLivesMatter

One of the major goals of the BLM movement, as articulated by its founders, is to make visible and combat anti-Black police brutality (Garza 2014). Although most respondents justify the participation of Afro-Latinxs in BLM by focusing on ethno-racial identity, phenotypical distinctions, and notions of diaspora, there was a small segment that responded by explicitly mentioning the concrete goals of BLM. For example, in explaining if and why Afro-Latinxs should participate in BLM, Rosa, who racially identifies as "Blaxican," replies,

> Absolutely. The police do not double check to make sure someone is only Black before shooting them. Any of us can be victims.

In this case, the respondent identifies concerns about police brutality, the focal point of BLM, and frames the value of Afro-Latinx participation as a function of this unique form of racism. Smith (2014) notes that pan-ethnic identities are made salient through racial consciousness and the recognition of disfranchisement and race-based discrimination. Much like Claudia, the respondent engages in differentiation that either appeals to notions of Afro-Latinxs mixed racial ancestry (she is not "only Black") or to the idea that African Americans (who are colloquially referred to as "regular Blacks" in relation to black immigrants) do not have the same origins. Even with these ethnic differentiations, she expresses her belief in linked-fate to ultimately affirm that Afro-Latinxs should participate in the movement based on their vulnerability to police brutality.

A second respondent in this category offers a terse response to our question by stating, "Yes, because cops only see the brown skin, they could care less where it originated from" (Regina, Dominican). According to Regina, Black visibility to law enforcement is the "only" characteristic necessary to trigger racially profiling. In this response, it is unclear whether the respondent perceives Afro-Latinxs, African Americans, and Black-identified groups to be the "same," but she does suggest (as have other respondents) that they are perceived to be the same in social interactions. Both Regina and Rosa link a Black-looking appearance to stereotypes of criminality, which they use to conclude that Afro-Latinxs should participate in the movement for this reason.

Other respondents who explicitly referred to police brutality in their responses still did so by either ignoring or minimizing Afro-Latinx identity or racial phenotype. Samantha asserts,

> Yes. Because everyone should stand up for injustice, and #blacklivesmatter is about police reform and bring (sic) awareness to police brutality, which is a major problem in the US. I do not see why anyone wouldn't want to speak out against injustice, no matter their identity.

Samantha is the only respondent whose justification for Afro-Latinx involvement respond to the movement's concern both about police violence and demands for policy change. However, she uses the "abstract liberalism" frame of color-blind racism to advocate for support based on

broader and universal ideas about human rights rather than note the movement's focus on antiracism and its relevance to Afro-Latinxs (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

Similar to Samantha, there were other respondents who highlighted the existence of police brutality but minimized the way that Afro-Latinxs' racialized experiences matter for participation in BLM. For example, Marina (Mexican) argued,

> If you see the importance of movements such as BLM then yes. I don't think you have to be black to participate though. BLM is for everyone who sees police brutality as an issue, especially among black people and other minorities.

Absent of a sense of urgency, she prefaces her comment with "*if* you see . . . ," which reveals she views participation as potentially important, but optional. Moreover, her generic and non-racial assertion that anyone interested in injustice should be involved echoes Samantha's appeal to abstract ideas about equality. By highlighting these appeals to universal claims, our goal is not to state that the movement is exclusive, but rather to elucidate one of the ways that Afro-Latinxs engage in questions about their participation in race-based movements.

Other responses to this question focused heavily on freedom and personal choice when justifying their answers about Afro-Latinxs participation in the BLM movement. These responses include the following:

> I feel like that is a personal choice for Afro Latinos to participate in the BlackLivesMatterMovement. Personally, I think if we are going through the same treatment as Afro-Americans then we should. (Luciana, Cuban)

> The black lives matter movement is important because whatever is the outcome or response to the movement is how all minorities are being treated-not just African Americans. I do however believe that people shouldn't be pressured to support something they may not resonate with. (Teresa, Dominican)

> If they want and choose to do so, yes. If they choose not to, that is their prerogative as well. (Zulema, Dominican)

The first respondent highlights participation in BLM as a personal choice, but suggests that there *should* be a strong motivation to do so based on experiencing the "same" treatment as African Americans. The second respondent does not provide an explicit "yes" but she advocates for participation less out of a sense of diasporic consciousness and more because of how police injustice could impact other minority groups and not "just African Americans." Finally, offering a short almost indifferent reply Zulema does not mention the goals of BLM, does not engage in ethnoracial distinctions, nor does she make any suggestion that Afro-Latinxs might be uniquely impacted by the goals of BLM. Her reply is devoid of any mention of race, ethnicity, or a sense that the movement carries resonance for Afro-Latinxs. This response is consistent with her responses to other survey questions. For example, Zulema "strongly disagre[ed]" that BLM would improve the lives of Afro-Latinxs. Additionally, Zulema's use of eight different terms to describe her racial identity (black, Mixed, Bi/Multiracial, Afro-Latina, black Latina, Latinegra, Negra, Morena) may also be indicative of her difficulties in reconciling her racial identity in a system of racial classification that is ill-equipped to capture her multidimensional identity.

Which Black Lives are We Talking about?

Of the Afro-Latinxs in our study, only two voiced explicit opposition to the BLM movement. To the question of whether Afro-Latinxs should participate in the movement, Ariana replied,

> I don't think so. It's a far left-progressive-socialist movement that's further dividing the black community in this country. It's bad news and I don't believe in that organization. (Belize/Honduran woman)

The respondent sees no value in the BLM Movement and, more importantly, views it as a threat to the unity of the black community. Disconnected from the actual aims of the movement, the comment neither addresses concerns with police brutality, nor does it address how the relationship that Afro-Latinxs have to blackness might potentially make the movement appealing to them. Ariana, whose family is Central American, summarily dismisses the movement as "bad news" without significant engagement with its goals.

The second respondent, who stated that Afro-Latinxs should not participate in the BLM Movement, reasons that Afro-Latinxs should not infringe on the issues that are important to Black Americans. She explains,

> No, because #BlackLivesMatter is exclusive to African Americans who are fighting against THEIR oppression. If we were to throw Afro-Latinos in the mix, it would blur the lines because now people may think the movement is fighting for anyone (black, Hispanic, white, etc.) who identifies as Afro-Latino/a. (Jennifer, Dominican/Puerto Rican)

Rather than adopt an understanding of race that transcends ethnicity, Jennifer views Afro-Latinxs and African Americans as two distinct groups facing disparate forms of oppression. Although her comments that BLM is an "exclusively" African American movement do not reflect the vision of the co-founders of the BLM (Garza 2014), it does speak to the importance of recognizing that some Afro-Latinxs may have a qualitatively different experience of being Black in the United States and feel that aligning themselves with a movement that centers race and blackness erases important aspects of their identity.

What is clear is that those few individuals who are included in this opposition category and who have rejected the involvement of Afro-Latinxs in BLM justify their rejection in a way that reveals that they conflate Black with African American. But, the tendency to conflate Black and African American and assume that BLM is an exclusively African American movement occurred even among those who supported the movement. Among supporters of the movement are the following responses:

> Yes . . . every Pro African American movement is a pro Afro Latino movement. [It] is part of the same at the end." (Ricardo, Puerto Rican)

> "Of course! We may not be 100% black but we are still black and therefore we should defend and fight for our people. The issues that affect African Americans also affect Afro Latinos and other blacks. (Ruth, Dominican)

> Yes, but unfortunately because of the conditioning and the founders it will be said it's an African American organization. Don't get me wrong I get why that's being said and I'm not trying to belittle their oppression at all. But I do believe we blacks no matter American, Latinx, and others should all come together as one. (Milagro, Puerto Rican)

Even as Ricardo recognizes the relevance of the movement for Afro-Latinxs, he characterizes it as a pro African American movement. In highlighting the movement's relevance for Afro-Latinxs, Ruth finds it necessary to explain that Afro-Latinxs are not "100%" Black as opposed to what she assumes to be the case for African Americans or other Black Americans. Yet still, Ruth argues that these presumed differences should not detract from the critical "fight" for equality. And, finally Milagros expresses support for Afro-Latinx participation in the movement; however, she is concerned that Afro-Latinx participation might "belittle" the oppression of African

Americans. In this, her comments resonate with the views of the anti-BLM respondent, Jennifer, though it leads to a different political decision.

This concern about belittling or co-opting a struggle that is not theirs is both the product of their own unique understandings of Blackness and Diaspora, but it is also shaped by their actual experiences with African Americans. Aptly representing a perspective articulated by respondents, Mateo notes,

> Many blacks don't accept us as black, yet take offence when we don't identify as black or prefer to primarily identify as latinx. It's a paradoxical conflict that leaves afro-latinx particularly marginalized. Blacks have no patience for the social lag of black acceptance in the Latin (sic) community. They want us to have the same degree of knowledge, ignoring that we don't have the same history (60's black love/power movement is only very recently occurring in some Latin countries on a smaller scale. (Mateo, Dominican)

Mateo emphasizes how black Americans sometimes lack patience for interacting with Afro-Latinxs as they move through their ethno-racial identity formation. Research suggests that this process is necessary because of the racial stigmatization that Afro-Latinxs face in their families' country of origin and within their families themselves (Comas-Díaz 1994; Hordge-Freeman 2015). As this research suggests, affirmations of blackness can be considered a betrayal especially in the context of families that have internalized the logic that success is measured by the ability to "mejorar la raza" or improve the race through whitening.

Discussion

All of the Afro-Latinxs in this study have a high level of Black racial consciousness in comparison to the considerable percentage of Afro-Latinxs who categorize themselves as white in the United States (Pew Research Center 2016). Within this high racial consciousness group, we still find diversity (and in some cases contradictions) in terms of how blackness is defined, how Diaspora is understood, and how Afro-Latinxs navigate their ethnoracial identity. These contradictions are part of the multi-layered process of identity, boundary work, and group consciousness that ultimately reaffirm that political solidarity does not require uniformity. Afro-Latinxs engage in an array of complex ethnoracial negotiations by sometimes minimizing ethnic differences, frequently highlighting the influence of racialization (how their racial identity is perceived by others), expressing a sense of linked fate, making claims of universality/color blindness, ethnic distancing, and/or by denying the importance of political mobilization altogether. Although we present their justifications for race-based mobilization in a way that may suggest they are categorically distinct, we use our analysis to illustrate moments of ruptures and the permeability of these categories especially for women. Their triple oppression and the inadequacy of existing racial and ethnic categories to articulate their identity play a role in the ruptures that respondents display as it relates to diasporic consciousness (Flores and Román 2009). Attentive to this embodied dislocation, Dache et al. (2019) argues, "[o]ne ever feels [her] three-ness—a Latina, a Negra, an American" (137).

Overall, Afro-Latinx respondents overwhelmingly support the BLM movement, but our analysis of their heterogeneous justifications for doing so reveals their sometimes ambivalent and unstable relationship with blackness and tenuous diasporic consciousness. For those who most explicitly convey their diasporic consciousness with assertive phrases such as "we are black" and "we are just black people in different locations," these respondents justify their support for BLM to reaffirm their racial identities. Although aware of group distinctions, these respondents prioritize a shared or linked black experience within the United States and view ethnic distinctions as insignificant. Similarly, some respondents simultaneously place themselves within the collective black identity, while highlighting ethnic differences between black Americans and Afro-Latinxs. In both

of these cases, respondents display diasporic consciousness and a sense of linked-fate, with the only difference being that one group ignores ethnic differences and the other embraces them.

However, some respondents engaged in boundary work more so at the interactional level with their support for BLM developing as a response to social perceptions of their phenotype and racialization, rather than their own sense of Black racial identity. Specifically, these respondents recognize a shared oppression/experience associated with being *perceived* as black and emphasized society's role in "stamping" them with a black identity. This reveals how a sense of linked-fate, especially when it is attached to superficial phenotypic characteristics, is not synonymous with diasporic consciousness. Focusing their identity solely on the perception of others, they adopt an attitude of "They see me as Black, therefore, I am Black." While the literature focuses on how diasporic consciousness emerges from a sense of linked fate, consistent with Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith (2019), we find linked fate does not automatically produce diasporic consciousness. Yet still, even in the absence of a shared diasporic consciousness, respondents who had a sense of linked fate and a more individualistic orientation chose to support the BLM movement.

For some respondents, how they view participation in the BLM movement affords more agency or flexibility in how they express their ethnoracial identity and racial solidarity. By stating that they support BLM simply because it positively impacts them, they show solidarity without having to racially identify using U.S. models of race. For Afro-Latinxs who may be in the process of ethnoracial identity formation, having the flexibility to support BLM without the pressure of having to articulate a particular racial identity may be particularly important for building racial solidarities. This flexibility is essential when considering the evolving nature of Afro-Latinxs' ethnoracial formation. For example, a recurrent assertion that Afro-Latinxs were protecting the interests of African Americans by not being involved in BLM may reflect the extent to which they are unclear about how they fit and/or their past experiences of being sanctioned in the past for presuming to be black.

Respondents represent more than 20 countries throughout Latin America and geographically, the majority are from Florida. However, the only major pattern related to geography that we find is that respondents who are more likely to use universal appeals were those who were of Afro-Mexican descent and from California. Framings of California as a mixed-raced utopia and the unique experiences of Afro-Mexicans in the United States may explain some of these differences (Romo 2011). Despite our inconclusive findings related to region, past findings about regional and even within-state specificities of race and ethnic for Latinxs, future studies should explore geographical distinctions to ensure these considerations are fully analyzed (Aranda et al. 2014). Likewise, the vast majority of the respondents are very well-educated (with college degree and upward), which is relevant because of previous studies note the significance of college as an important pathway for individuals to discover or explore their Afro-Latinidad identity. Future studies might explore pathways for Afro-Latinxs with a lower socioeconomic background alongside how documentation status, generation, and access to internet/social media function as factors.

With regard to gender, the underrepresentation of men may reflect the reality that Afro-Latinx men (similar to racially mixed men) are less likely to self-identify based on an ethno-racial identity (Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Previous research suggests that since black men (of any ethnicity) need to be hyper-aware of their blackness to survive in racist societies, they tend to have a much more salient racial identity. Indeed, all of the Black men in this study supported the BLM regardless of the terms they used to describe themselves racially and ethnically. Future studies might oversample Afro-Latinx men to explore the extent to which they express the same range of heterogeneous justifications to this question about race-based mobilization. Similarly, the overrepresentation of women in the study suggests that Afro-Latinx identity may be more salient for women and/or Afro-Latinx may be more likely to pursue belonging through membership in virtual communities (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020).

On one hand, it is not surprising that the link between identity, group consciousness, and perceptions of political movements is a complex process. But, we focus on Afro-Latinxs because they have a higher level of Black racial consciousness than other Latinxs and they often come from countries (and families) where blackness is stigmatized or rendered invisible. As a result, the difficulties that they have in placing themselves within existing schemas lead to different understandings of who they are and different perceived options for how they should align themselves in their negotiations of blackness, Latinidad, and political mobilization. We are now several decades post-1965 immigration era and we are currently in a contentious political moment that has groups around the affirming, "Black Lives Matter." The normalization of virulent anti-immigration in the United States, the escalation of racial tensions, alongside the burgeoning protests and black consciousness movements across Latin America, means that there is both a crisis and also an opportunity for solidarity. Afro-Latinxs' position in this crucible will be a critical consideration in who participates in major movements and what happens when these contestations are resolved. If Santana's approach to his Afro-Latinx identity serves as a guide, BLM leaders may need to reiterate the inclusive principles of the movement. Otherwise, it risks a disconnection from people whose lives are very much impacted by police brutality but who believe the BLM movement does not pertain to them or who may be under the impression that they must abandon their ethnic identity in exchange for racial solidarity. In fact, because Afro-Latinxs face a "double disadvantage" and in the case of Afro-Latinx women, "triple oppression," it may be important to explicitly link how the criminalization of immigration, threat of patriarchy, and ongoing anti-Blackness work hand in hand. By doing so, what might currently function as a source of fragmentation could be leveraged as a path toward unity and solidarity.

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