

Latino Males, Masculinity and
Marginalization: A Summary Report on a
Research and Policy Forum

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**Latino Males, Masculinity and Marginalization:
A Summary Report on a Research and Policy Forum**

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Latino Males and Masculinity

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Introduction

In recent years, research on men and masculinity has increased substantially. This body of work has been generated to a large degree by a growing awareness that prior research on gender was imbalanced in that it primarily focused upon the condition and experiences of women and girls in society. The new research on men and masculinity has begun to interrogate the role of men in society, the ways in which cultural and structural systems of patriarchy are maintained, and the various ways in which masculine gender roles shape the identities and experiences of men and boys in society.

Some of the existing research on men and masculinity is driven by an awareness that many social phenomena - violence, labor market patterns, family structure, academic performance, to name just a few - might be better understood by focusing directly on the role of gender in the manifestation of these phenomena. As this awareness has increased, the number of studies focused explicitly on men and masculinity has increased substantially, and in some universities, it has begun to rival women's studies. Gradually, the study of men and masculinity is occupying a space as a legitimate subject of research in the field of gender studies in the social sciences and humanities.

As is true in women's studies, research and scholarship on men and masculinity has gradually moved from broad generalizations about the role and status of men in society to a more nuanced analysis that acknowledges the importance of other categories of difference, namely race, class, sexuality, culture, and national origin, in shaping the experience of males in society. This is particularly the case with regard to African American males. Though African American males constitute a relatively small percentage of the US population, this constituency is confronted with a broad array of hardships and disadvantages that have compelled scholars and policymakers to do more to understand and respond to these problems. This concern has given rise to a growing body of scholarship aimed at understanding the nature of the challenges confronting African American males and devising the most appropriate ways in which to respond.

Surprisingly, there has not been a similar growth in scholarship directed at the challenges and issues confronting Latino males in American society. This is surprising because, like African American males, Latino males find themselves conspicuously overrepresented in certain negative categories - those who drop out of school, are incarcerated, and murdered, to name a few - and

underrepresented in other categories associated with success – those who earn advanced university degrees, high incomes, or rise to positions of political leadership.

There are many possible reasons for the lack of focus on Latino males. First, Latinos are by definition an extraordinarily diverse group, comprised of individuals from a variety of countries, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and there are significant regional variations in the Latino experience. While it could be argued that it is problematic to rely upon race as a category of research for any group due to the ways in which diversity related to class, phenotype, educational background, and other characteristics shape and influence human experience, for Latinos, using race, or the broad and sloppy rubric of Latino identity, as the basis for research and analysis is even more problematic.

Second, because of the diversity within the Latino population, many of the challenges that are specific to Latino males often go unrecognized and, therefore, do not receive the attention they deserve. For example, while Latino incarceration and homicide rates are much lower than those experienced by African American males, they are still considerably higher than those experienced by White males. Moreover, when Latinos are broken down by national origin, social class, or region, it becomes clear that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to certain hardships and challenges (e.g., Puerto Rican males are much more likely to drop out of school, Mexican American males in California are more likely to be incarcerated, etc.) while others (e.g., Cubans and South Americans) are less so.

Finally, the relative dearth of Latino scholars and scientists in academic institutions and research centers is also a factor contributing to the shortage of studies on Latino males and masculinity. Historically, much of the scholarship on racial minorities and groups that have been marginalized and discriminated against in American society (i.e., women, gays and lesbians, religious minorities, etc.) has been carried out to a large degree by members of those groups. The absence of a critical mass of Latino scholars who understand and are concerned about the challenges facing Latino males has undoubtedly contributed to the shortage of studies on this topic.

Such absence in scholarship and concern for this group established the need for a convening that examined the questions, what is the status of Latino males, and how do we intervene? This report serves as a summary on the status of Latino males, the expert opinions of scholars, and initial thoughts on a research and policy intervention agenda.

The Convening of Experts

On January 17 and 18, 2008, the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, under the leadership of Pedro Noguera and funding support from the Ford Foundation, convened leading scholars engaged in research related to the experiences and conditions of Latino males in the United States. The task for these scholars was two-fold: 1) to identify the key areas of current and additional research; and 2) to situate the current state of interventions and to generate possible interventions.

The forum had a three-part structure.

1. **First** a presentation on the status of Latino males in the US across various social conditions (i.e., mental health, labor market participation, educational attainment, composition, health indicators).
2. **Second** part of the forum involved scholars engaged in a structured discussion about the possible reasons for the status of Latino males and policy intervention.
3. **Lastly**, the advisory board, comprised of five scholars, met the following day to assess the meeting and provide guidance for next steps.

As a result of the convening, scholars were encouraged to provide monographs regarding the state of what is known within their respective fields; these monographs will result in an edited volume. This report serves to provide a summary of the research and policy areas outlined by these leading scholars.

Framing the Status of Latino Males

Composition of the Latino Male Population

The Latino population in the US is diverse but overwhelmingly Mexican. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of Latinos by national groups. In terms of national origin, the Latino population disaggregates as follows: Mexican (65.5%), Puerto Rican (8.6%), Cuban (3.7%), Central American (8.2%), South American (6.0%), and Other Latinos (8.0%). These percentages are reflective of the approximately 43.2 million Latinos in the United States as of 2006.¹ There are 28.3 million Mexicans, 3.7 million Puerto Ricans, 1.6 million Cubans, 3.5 million Central Americans, 2.6 million South Americans, and 3.4 million other Latinos. As such understanding the Latino male condition must involve the disaggregation by national group, as well as region in order to understand whether outcomes are appearing differently across groups and regions.

The Latino male population, just over 22 million, is mostly comprised of men under the age of 35. According to the American Community Survey,² 65% of Latino men are under 35 years of age. This translates into a mean age of 21.7. Among Mexican males, 67.5% are under 35 years of age, similar to Puerto Ricans (63.3%), and Central Americans (65.1%). On the other hand, Cuban males under 35 years of age are only 44.2% of the population, and among South American males, 56.3% are under 35 years of age. Nativity status is another crucial dimension in understanding

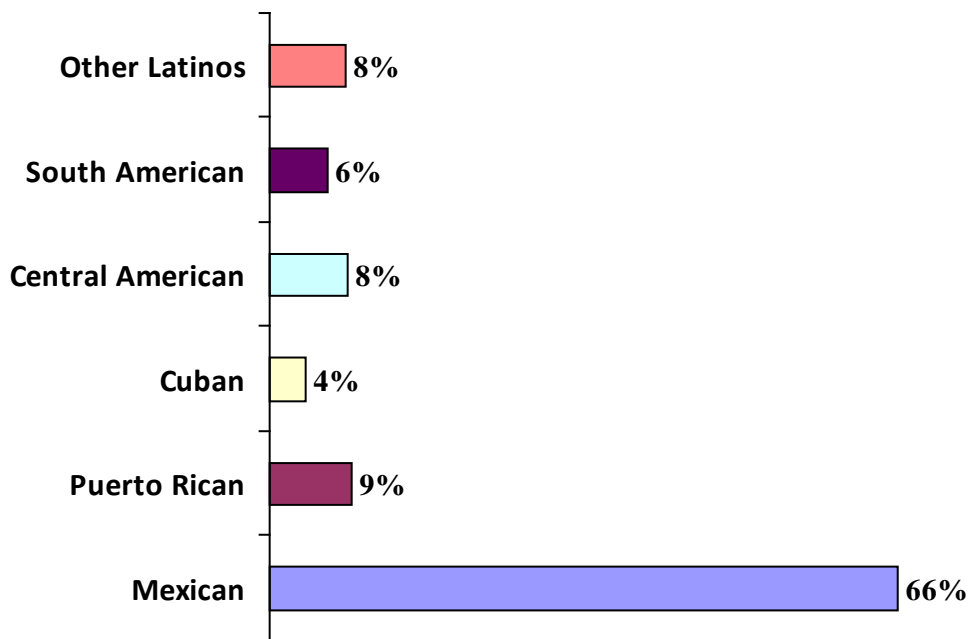


Figure 1: Percentage of Latinos in the US by National Origin: 2006

Latino males. The Latino male population in the United States is comprised mostly of native-born (58.2%). Similar to the age group distribution, nativity status differs across national groups; much of this difference is probably due to the immigration history of the various national groups and their current status. The majority of Cuban males (59%), Central American (71.6%), and South American males (68.7%) are foreign born. Meanwhile, the majority of Mexican males are native born (58.9%).

Educational Attainment

From childhood to adulthood the educational outcomes of Latinos, in general, and Latino males, specifically, are limited. Across the United States, the majority of Latinos are attending segregated schools and more often than not these schools are also overcrowded. Over the last decade, Latino segregation has increased in almost all regions of the United States.³ In the West, 81% of Latinos attend non-White majority schools; in the Northeast, 44% of Latinos attend schools that are 90-100% minority, and 15% attend schools with a 99-100% minority student population.⁴ When looking at high schools, more than 50% of the Latino high school student population attends the largest 10 percent of public high schools. In addition, Latinos are 50 times more likely than Whites to attend public high schools with more than 1,800 students and a student body with more than 67% eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.⁵

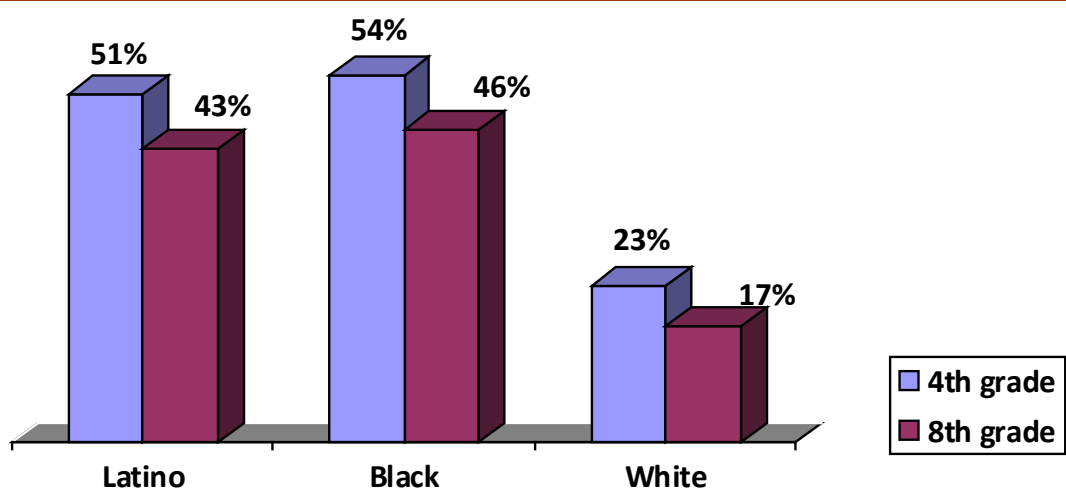
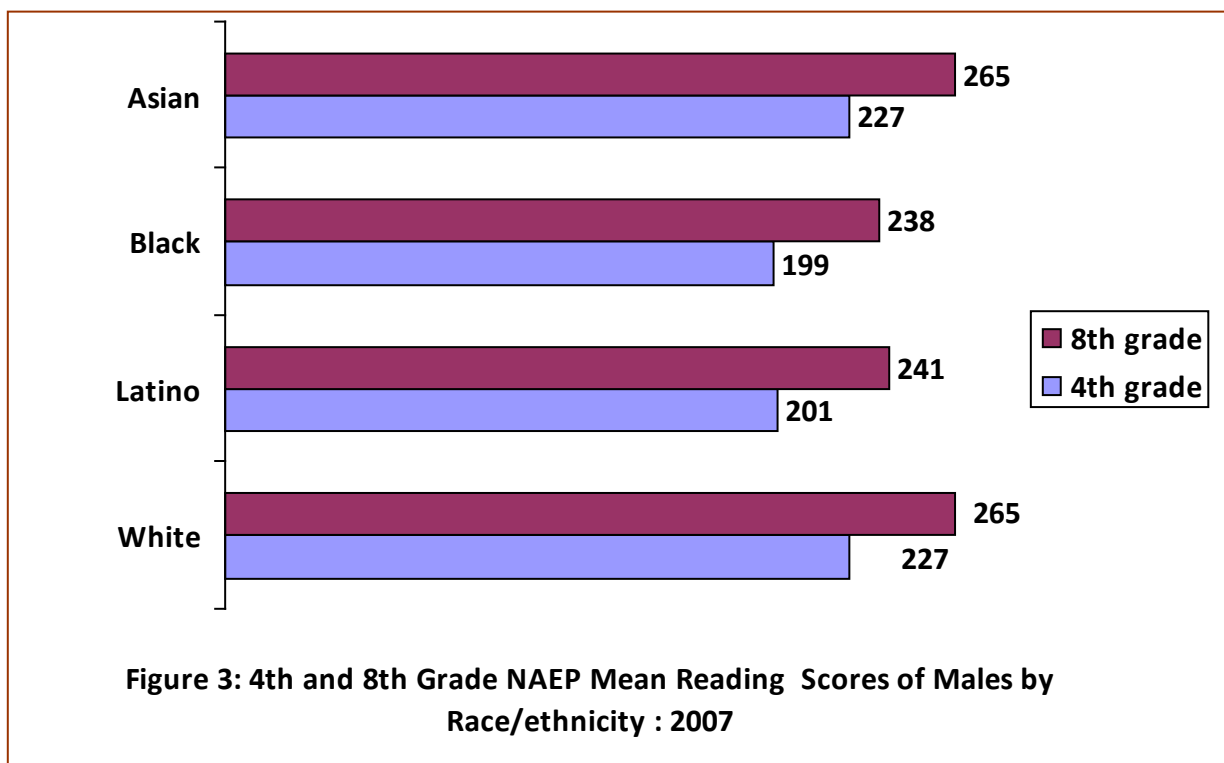


Figure 2: Percentage of students below basic proficiency by Race/Ethnicity: 2007

In many racially/ethnically isolated schools Latino students are experiencing minimal educational success. In 2007, more than half of Latino children in 4th grade were reading below basic proficiency (51%), meanwhile, only 23% of White 4th graders were below proficiency.⁶ The percentage of 8th grade Latino students below basic proficiency (43%), while less than 4th graders, differs greatly from the only 17% of White 8th graders at or below basic proficiency (See Figure 2).

The achievement story of Latino males also includes a performance distance with other racial/ethnic groups, primarily Whites. In Figure 3, the 4th and 8th grade mean reading scores of Latino males is approximately 20 points below their White peers.⁷ Unfortunately, by the time Latino males are in high school about one in every two (49%) graduates.⁸ This figure is comparable to Black males (48%), however, it is much lower than White males (74%). Latino males graduate at lower rates than all Latino students (53%) and Latina females (58%). The aggregate of these outcomes may explain why the college-going rate is minimal among this population. In 2004, of the 18- to 24-year-old Latino male population, only 21.7% enrolled in college, which is lower than Whites (38.4%), Blacks (26.5%), and Asians (63%) in the same age group.⁹

The aggregate of this educational attainment suggests Latino males are not attaining academic proficiency and **a significant percentage are not graduating high school nor**

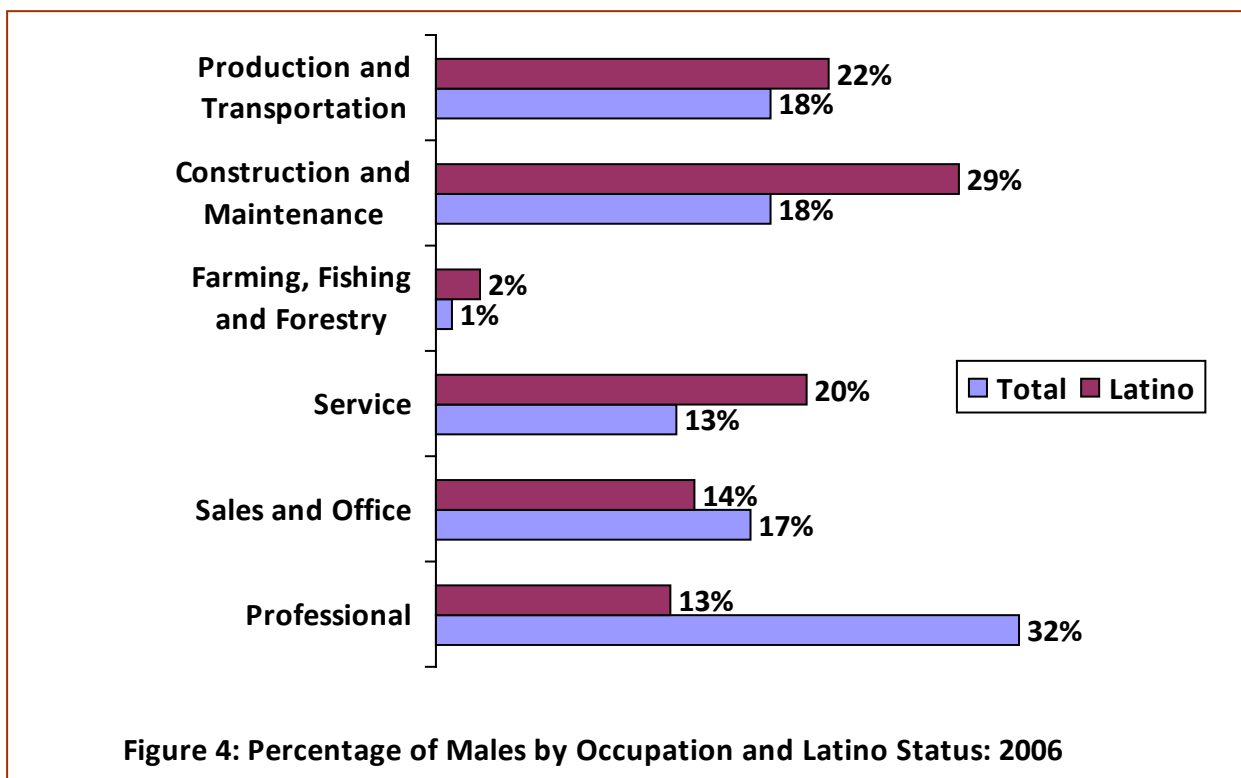


enrolling in college. Such patterns of educational attainment not only challenge the social mobility of this population, but may partially explain their pattern of labor market participation.

Labor Market Participation

Although the Latino male population appears to have limited educational attainment, they maintain high employment rates. In 2006, of the Latino males in the civilian labor force (approximately 12 million), 93.8% were employed, while only 6.2% were unemployed.¹⁰ These unemployment rates mirror White males (5.1% unemployed), however, they are significantly lower than Black males (11.8% unemployed). These rates however differ within national origin groups. For example, the rates of unemployment are slightly higher among Puerto Ricans (8.4%), but similar between Mexicans (4.9%), Cubans (5.4%), Central Americans (5.9%), and South Americans (5%)¹¹.

The majority of employed Latino males are in blue collar jobs. As figure 4 illustrates, among the 2006 Latino male population in the workforce, nearly three fourths were employed in three industries: Production and transportation (21.5%), Construction and maintenance (28.7%) and, Services (20.3%). Smaller percentages were in professional (12.9%) or sales and office occupations (14.2%). When compared to the total male population, the story differs– about half of



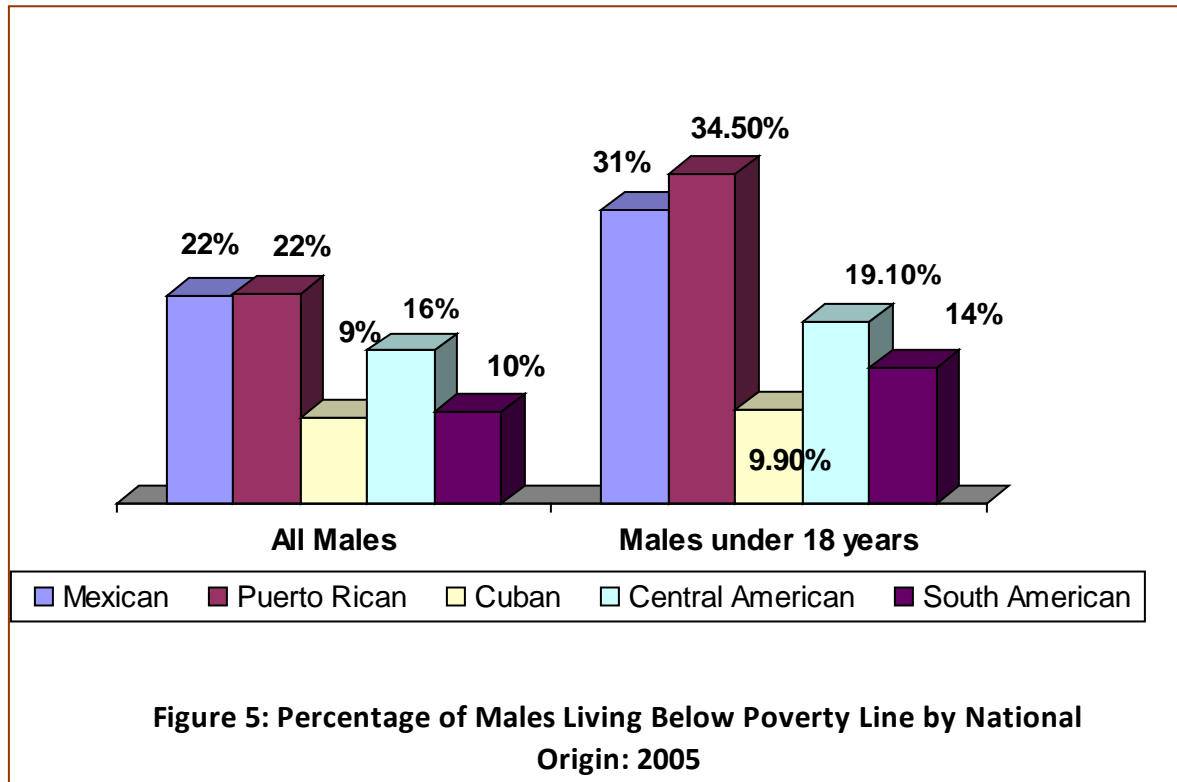
the total male population work in either professional (32%) or sales and office occupations (17.2%); the rest work in production and transportation (18.3%), construction and maintenance (18.3%), and service (13.2%).

Another unique pattern found among Latino males is their overrepresentation among employed dropouts. In 2004, more than 44% of the high school dropout population in the workforce was Latino males.¹² This rate is dramatically different than in 1980, when 70% of the male high school dropout population in the workforce was White. This means that Latino males are not only mostly occupying blue collar jobs but also are becoming the “new face of the low wage industry.”¹³ Such labor market participation may also explain the median earnings of this population. Latino males earn the least (about \$27,000 in 2006 dollars) when compared to their Asian, White (non-Hispanic), Pacific Islander, or Black (non-Hispanic) counterparts. The median earnings for the rest of the racial and ethnic populations were above \$30,000 a year.¹⁴ Full-time Latino workers earned considerably less than the total of all men (\$26,769 vs. \$41,386 – in 2006 dollars).¹⁵

Poverty Rates

The poverty pattern among Latinos in general mirrors that of other racial/ethnic minority groups, except Asians. In 2006, over 20% of Latinos lived below the poverty line.¹⁶ Among Latino children, 28% lived at/or below the poverty line during this time period.¹⁷ Such poverty was found to be more intense in states like Texas, in which 35% of Latino children lived below the poverty line.¹⁸

When examining these poverty rates among Latino males across national groups, distinct patterns emerged. As Figure 5 illustrates, in 2005, nearly one in every five Mexican (21.7%) and Puerto Rican (22%) males lived below the poverty line, while less than 10% of the Cuban (9%) and South American (9.7%) male population were poor.¹⁹



What is important to note about these poverty rates is the fact they have not changed. Since 2002, the poverty rates among Latinos and Blacks have remained unchanged, which signals a steady impact on the stability and social mobility of the Latino community.²⁰

Incarceration Rates

The above figures represent the pattern among the vast majority of Latino males, however, about 1% of the population is also incarcerated. In 2006, 19% of the males sentenced under State or Federal jurisdiction was Latino (approximately 290,500), the third highest percentage when compared to their White (31.8%) and Black (35.6%) counterparts.²¹ Since 2001, the rate of Latino male prisoners has been on the rise, from 200,000 to 290,500.²²

When disaggregated by age group, over 50% of the Latino men in correctional institutions were between the ages of 20 and 34. This also translates into 3.9% of the Latino men ages 20-24 are in prison, which is second to Black men with 10.5% in the same age group.²³ When looking closely at adolescents (ages 10 to 17), the differences in juvenile detention rates between Black, Latino, and Native American males is dramatically different than White and Asian adolescent males. In 2004, placement rates of Blacks males in juvenile detention centers is 1,279 per 100,000, followed by Native American males with 775 per 100,000, and then Latino males with 600 per

100,000. The rates for White adolescent males is 305 per 100,000 and Asian males 190 per 100,000.²⁴ This pattern among adolescent and adult males is of particular concern not only because of its immediate impact on the trajectory of these individuals but also the impact on their families and the eventual re-entry of these adolescents and men into their communities.

Homicide Rates

The concern over the status of Latino males also includes their public health status, particularly mortality. Of particular concern is the alarming rate in which homicide is occurring among teens and young adult Latino males. Between the ages of 1 to 34, homicide is one of three leading causes of death among Latino males.²⁵ In 2003, the death rate among Latino males ages 20 to 24 years old (125 per 100,000) was significantly lower than for Black males (232 per 100,000) and even for White males (128 per 100,000).²⁶ However, in 2003, Latino males ages 15-19 had the second highest death rates (after Black males, 58.9%) by homicide (25.1%). This pattern of homicide is mostly attributed to gang violence. And by 2004 and 2005, homicide was the second leading cause of death among 10-24-year-old Latino males; it accounted for more than 25% of deaths.²⁷

Health

HIV and AIDS

Public health concerns also extend to the well-being of Latino males. One of the fastest growing health issues facing the Latino community is the increasing rate of HIV and AIDS cases. In 2005, Latinos accounted for 18.9% of persons who received an AIDS diagnosis; this translates to over 33,000 new AIDS cases.²⁸ Latino men report higher percentages of ever being tested for HIV (35%) than their White counterparts (30%), and lower than their Black counterparts (52%). However, according to the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, in 2004, Latino men were 2.6 times more likely to die from HIV/AIDS when compared to non-Latino White males.²⁹ In addition, sixty-one percent of Latino males with an HIV diagnosis acquired through male-to-male contact, and 17% of males acquired through high-risk heterosexual contact. Finally, the rates among Latino males are vastly different than Latino females. The HIV/AIDS diagnosis rate is 56.2 per 100,000 among males and 15.8 per 100,000 for females.³⁰

Health Insurance

Shaping the nature of these public health concerns within the Latino community and beyond is the number of Latinos without health insurance. This indicator is important because of its impact on health status and mortality. Among the overall Latino community, 32.7 percent of the population in 2003 and 2004 were uninsured; this translates to 13.7 million Latinos.³¹ The story is particularly problematic among Latino children; 21.1 percent are uninsured while their Black and White counterparts maintain lower rates (13 and 7.6 percent, respectively).³² Interestingly, Latino males are the next group of concern regarding health insurance. Although many are in the workforce, the overrepresentation of Latino males in low-wage industries can probably explain the high rates of this population uninsured. Among Latino men ages 18- 29, over 56% are uninsured, as well as a slightly lower percentage (44.8%) among ages 30-44.³³ The result of this negative pattern has implications on the timeliness and type of health service provided, which eventually affects mortality rates. Thus, health insurance becomes a critical public health concern to address in improving the trajectory of Latinos and Latino males.

Conclusion

Overall, the status of Latino males across social, economic, and educational outcome indicators establishes that nearly half of the Latino male population is not graduating high school, the majority of Latino men above 18 are involved in the service and industry side of the labor market, and over a third of Latino males between the ages of 15 and 35 are experiencing serious public health concerns involving HIV and AIDS, no health insurance, and homicide. Such alarming patterns raise substantive questions as to how this occurred and what are the necessary interventions to alter these patterns of limited social and economic mobility, and health status. Even though we understand that not all Latino males are at risk, such patterns necessitate a call to understand how such patterns emerged and how we remedy from a national and local policy perspective.

Understanding the Problem:

Expert Responses

The patterns found among Latino males, particularly among males under 35 and among those of Mexican, Central and South American descent, demonstrates a distinct trajectory of disenfranchisement that will have a generational impact on this community. Our gathering of research scholars who explore the different dimensions of social, economic, and educational attainment of Latinos in general, and of males specifically, provided an opportunity to fully comprehend what is still missing in research and intervention work to systematically outline a course of action.

During our discussion, the scholars argued that the social outcomes of Latino males in the United States are informed by a number of intersecting social phenomena: Masculinity, patriarchy, racism, economic shift, criminalization, human agency, role modeling, and developmental transitions. However, the scholars interject a need for the current research path to deepen by using various analytical approaches in order to understand the complex ways these factors impact outcomes. The following is a summary of how the attending scholars situated each of these factors in operation and the type of the analytical approach needed to understand its impact.

The Role of Masculinity

- **Latino males, as other males in our society, are subject to the role of masculinity in their lives. Patriarchy is responsible for defining and sustaining hegemonic models of masculinity.** There is a code of how men should behave and engage in the world. This code dictates their behavior, mannerisms, their sense of self, and their relationship with women and each other. It also creates a pecking order that stratifies power dynamics between men and women and among men themselves. As such, unequal power, access, and wealth are distributed based on their position in the hierarchy. In most cases, Latino males operate from a precarious position within this hierarchy and suffer the consequences as a result.
- **The common perception in the US is that Latino males exercise machismo – a hypermasculine, irresponsible, domineering and sexist trait in their private and**

public lives. Latino males are commonly conceived/understood as insatiable lovers and overly domineering in their homes. This perception leaves them open to criticism from other members of our society. While some Latinos may exhibit these traits, this depiction is a reduction of the multifarious types of men in Latino communities. Thus, the diversity is lost in the stereotype and they are unduly criticized for their supposed ubiquitous behavior.

- **The association of Latino men with machismo is largely a result of structural racism in the United States.** This association perpetuates the idea that Latino males are somehow inferior or damaged; that they lack an understanding of healthy relationships between men and women evident in the dominant society. Unspoken, however, is the fact that while Latino men exhibit some measure of machismo, it is not a unique experience or defining characteristic of Latino men. It is, in fact, found in all men in this society but is singularly imposed upon Latino men to define them as “others,” different, and ultimately, damaged and dangerous. In this context, associating machismo with Latino men contributes to their marginalization within the larger US society. This is particularly interesting since the term “machismo” was part of the US Western expansion narrative, a trait of the cowboy; and until recently, the term was more commonly heard in the US than in Latin America.
- **Machismo must be understood in the context of patriarchy; and, as such, is part – to varying degrees – of Latino culture.** In some households, machismo has damaged Latino men’s relationships with their wives and family unit. Since in a patriarchal society they are expected to oversee the welfare of their family, some Latino men find the recent equalization of responsibilities in the household less than welcoming, which, in turn, creates a number of problems with their spouse and family. Some men lose their family and household as a result of the sexist belief in the role of the man as the head of household. The disintegration of the family unit is one example of the potential outcome of an unwillingness to redefine the role of men in our society.
- **Latina women are insisting that a different arrangement than patriarchy is necessary for the health (both literal and metaphorical) of the family unit.** For Latino men in lower socioeconomic status, the consequences of family dissolution are greater when compared to men with more resources. As such, Latino men in lower socioeconomic positions have more to lose than other men in similar predicaments.

- **Machismo as a negative and defining trait among Latino men is continually reinforced by the United States media.** This reification of Latino male masculinity fuels both exogenous and endogenous problems for Latino men. The effects of our shared definition of masculinity – along with other structural impediments -- disproportionately affect Latino men. The unfortunate outcomes are then used as proof that they are, in fact, somehow damaged, inferior, and that their marginalization is justified.

In general, the role of masculinity is far-reaching and resonates in how public policies are constructed (e.g., welfare reform, public housing). The Forum scholars suggest that multiple masculinities, which expand beyond hetero-normative constructions and into more positive associations with families and women (and even feminism), must be incorporated into future examination of Latino males and public policy. In addition, the effects of “micro” and “macro” processes, including globalization, must be taken into account so as to identify how changing gender roles (such as new placement in subordinate work positions) contribute to the ways in which Latino men see themselves, especially as compared to the ways in which they are seen by outside groups.

Role of Racial Hierarchy and Social Institutions

- **Racial hierarchy exists within the US context and Latinos are subject to racialization processes.** Since racial categorization is largely mediated by phenotype, Latinos challenge the Black-White dichotomy: they represent the gradations that exist within these social constructions and across the continuum. Nonetheless, Latinos as a community are not beyond the racialization process. Depending upon their phenotype, education, and socioeconomic status, some Latinos are categorized (and self-define) as Whites, while others are categorized (and self-define) as Black. For some Latinos, their racial self-identity matches that of the category that is often assigned to them by the social construct, while others experience a mismatch. The racialization process creates a segmented assimilation and lived experience within Latino communities, and it is specifically deleterious for Latino men who end up being seen as Black or dark when compared to their lighter-skin counterparts.

- **For Latino men, racialization into a marginalized category creates what has been referred to as “racially stigmatized masculinities.”** These Latino men are viewed with suspicion and are often seen as problematic, rather than as an asset to the larger community, regardless of how they perform as citizens. It is no surprise that darker-skin boys and men disproportionately bear the burden of unnecessary and abusive monitoring – at schools, with the police and in the public sphere at large.
- **Schooling provides a forceful setting in which racialization occurs and propagates.** In some ethnographic work, students – of all shades – state that racism did not exist within their peer group, meanwhile socially rewarding (vis-à-vis popularity) the lightest skin boy or girl. As such, racialization occurs early, and is sustained and perpetuated by students of all phenotypes. In addition, schools provide the public setting that harbors and inadvertently supports this process.

In general, the scholars suggest that an in-depth examination of race, gender stigma and national origin may lead to an increased understanding of the reasons Latino males – boys, in particular – are experiencing failure in the United States in such large percentages.

Effects of the Changing Economy

- **The shift from an industrial economy to an informational service economy is largely responsible for the dismantling of the working class.** This change in the economy and its consequences for the middle class have left Latino families in a precarious socioeconomic position. Latino males have endured a disproportionate burden as a result of our changing economy. Latino males lag behind most other groups in educational attainment at a time when work requires higher levels of education. At the aggregate level, the changing economy is partly responsible for the lagging of educational attainment and achievement, and income and wealth accumulation of Latino males when compared to their White counterparts. Equally, however, some Latino males have carved opportunities unseen by native born men and, in some instances, have been vilified for their efforts. Day laborers are a perfect example.
- **The rise of street economies (cigarette trafficking, for example) has also been positively correlated with the rise of incarceration, which has affected Black and Latino males disproportionately.** Changes in the economy and its accompanying

consequences have created a political backlash against Latinos. The immigration discourse and the criminalization of Latinos are just two examples of the political backlash against Latinos, particularly Latino males.

Criminalization of Latino Males

- **The criminalization of Latino males is partly a result of the nexus between institutional racism and the United States' shifting economy.** While higher incarceration rates have a number of causes, including the rise of informal economies, Latino males – after controlling for a number of factors – are overrepresented in the prison-industrial complex. The criminalization of Latino males not only disproportionately occurs in the justice system; it can also be seen in another less visible but equally important institution: schools.
- **The rise of zero-tolerance policies, increasing presence of police, and monitoring in educational settings, particularly in lower-income neighborhood schools, has effectively marshaled young Latino men out of the classroom and into prison cells.** For example, today students are being arrested and handcuffed for infractions that a generation before would have landed them at the Dean's office. Additionally, a number of structural conditions have created between-school tracking: the graduates of one kind of school are on the way to college, while the graduates of others are substantially more likely to end up in jail. The consequences of participation in the prison-industrial complex are deleterious both in the short and long term. In the short term, incarcerated students are in jail cells, rather than in classroom; thus, compounding the effects of lower quality schooling, including the widening of the achievement gap between Latinos and their White counterparts.
- **Incarcerated students are more likely to dropout and less likely to become a productive young adult. In the long term, depending on the transgression, incarcerated Latinos may lose some of their rights as citizens, and are less likely to become productive, educated members of our society, which, in turn, prevents them from being able to harness opportunities for their own offspring.** The consequences become intergenerational and sometimes cyclical. Participation in the prison-industrial complex also molds the perception about Latino males for the larger society. The media has

done a particularly effective job of portraying Latino delinquents as representative of the entire Latino community by examining neither the cause nor the effects of incarceration for this population. Thus, criminalization of Latino males further limits their acceptance into larger, White communities.

- **The most pernicious aspect of the criminalization of Latino men is that once young men are arrested when they are in their teens, there is not a dearth of services or spaces that allow them to process that experience.** It becomes a traumatic experience that is more the norm than the exception in some localities. As a result, there is an accumulation of group trauma that morphs their relationship with adults and authority in general. Thus, the development of an intellectual, theoretical paradigm must be developed to help us understand how young Latino males experience and process their incarceration and how to effectively help them overcome it.

Role of Human Agency

- **Despite the structural factors that forcefully shape Latino males' experience, it is also important to address the role of agency in their life outcomes.** Agency refers to the ability of individuals to act independently of the social structure around them – to exercise free will despite opposing circumstances. The extent to which Latino males exercise agency is based on the way they interpret the world around them and their conception of the proper role and activity in which they should engage to be accepted. Ethnographic work has shown the ability of Latino males to succeed in school, maintain jobs, sustain families, overcome incarceration, and become fruitful citizens despite their upbringing, neighborhoods or other demoralizing and limiting circumstances. While social scientists have described the tools and strategies these young men use to rise above their structural impediments, we also know that agency is a product of a number of phenomena. As such, the combination of tools and available support systems for young men to make positive, healthy, and helpful decisions varies from individual to individual. The result may be the same, but the pathways vary.
- **The absence of fathers in some Latino communities limits the extent to which agency can be exercised and summoned toward upward mobility.** Fathers are the role models for the next generation of young men. They provide guidance, support, and act as a moral

compass for their children. This stewardship is missing for a substantial number of Latino men. Men carry with them a sense of betrayal and distrust that their absent father has inadvertently created. This sense of betrayal and distrust is oftentimes replicated in their sons, engendering an intergenerational cycle. The trauma experienced by a high concentration of young men in their neighborhoods, becomes group trauma, creating an unfortunate norm within some communities, and compounding the difficulty for Latino men trying to be positive role models for their sons and their communities. Often this dearth of positive role models hinders any attempt made by young Latino men to exercise agency and build a healthy family unit.

- **The paucity of role models for Latino males has been particularly pernicious because it has left an individual and collective void in some Latino communities, which, in turn, has made some Latino young men susceptible to military recruiting.** Military recruiters have offered a number of incentives to Latino male youth to join their ranks, including fast-track citizenship. The most effective tool, however, has been the military recruiters' position as role model, which includes imposing their brand of manhood onto Latino youth. Latino men, facing a scarcity of positive role models, have been captured by this campaign, thus increasing the number of Latino men in the military. In some cases, the military has set up academies in especially susceptible neighborhoods (high poverty and segregated) to enlist Latino youth at a young age.

Role of Developmental Transitions

- **For all young men, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is chaotic, difficult, self-defining, and exciting.** For Latino men, blossoming into adulthood occurs in a troubled context, one composed of "multiple marginalities": economic blight, social pressures, cultural intolerance, and racial profiling. Some young Latino males encounter a number of traumas that further curtail their healthy development: the trauma of immigration, the trauma of parent joblessness, the trauma of alcoholism, and the trauma of fatherlessness. These features of the lives of many poor Latino male youth complicate the healthy transition to adulthood, diverting both individual and collective efforts away from being constructive citizens in American society. It goes without saying that Latino males suffer psychologically from all these factors holding sway over their lives. Psychologists

have shown that the voyage through adolescence diminishes young men's ability to discuss emotions and feelings, which is crucial for their productive development. Young men lose touch with each other, qualitatively changing the nature of their relationships with their male peers as a consequence of the culture of homophobia, which discourages close, meaningful, and emotionally supportive male friendships.

- **In the context of broken homes with absent fathers or father-figures, young Latino males assume the role of the man of the house.** Latino males experience a curtailed adolescence as they assume familial responsibilities for which they are unprepared. American society's view of these young 11- to 14-year-old boys as men does not help them navigate their own adolescence. Instead, they are pushed onto the adult stage without the psychological maturity or human and social capital necessary for successful integration into adulthood.

In general, analyzing the plight of Latino males from a human development framework, particularly by dissecting their voyage from adolescence to adulthood is imperative. It accounts for the dialectic between individuals and their environment and clarifies the causes and processes that hinder the physical, mental, and emotional health of Latino males and lays out the trajectory for positive change.

Conclusion:

Suggestions for Research and Policy Interventions

The scholars argued for a number of research strategies and other research traditions to help inform the next trajectory of research and policy interventions.

Research Agenda

- **Involve the communities in research projects from inception to collection and through data analysis.** Past research has mostly been an undemocratic process. In other words, the subjects whom the research is about are most often excluded from the research itself.
- **Synthesize past research done in order to create research questions and projects that build on past work rather than recreate the wheel.** In particular, one scholar argued there is a rich Chicano literature that illuminates the many issues “Latinos” face today. The Chicano literature can provide insight about the directions research must advance today and which issues must be revisited. In other words, Chicano literature has already laid down the ground work for a broader Latino research agenda.
- **Examine the utility of using “Latino” as a conceptual tool, despite the diversity within the population it describes.** We must consider internal diversity, regional variation, different migration histories, and political circumstances that moved “Latinos” from being “Chicanos;” and thus, there is much that Latinos share above and beyond their differences.
- **Increase attention to the use of measures, such as psychometrics, to address issues of validity and reliability in research endeavors.** Latino literature has emphasized conceptual tools without equally attending to a particular concept’s reliability and validity.
- **There is a need to carry research with anti-racist methodology, which includes conceptually conducting Latino male research from an intersectionality perspective.** Conceptual tools must account for gender, class, race, national origin, immigrant status, among other variables. Feminist literature has had a long history of intersectionality research and could provide models for this kind of work.
- **Develop theory in the service of activism.** There continues to be a paucity of theory in the service of change. This development of this kind of theory is necessary in order to develop research projects that aim to understand social phenomena while providing a framework

with which to understand how to change processes that may be detrimental to the subjects of the study, in the case of Latino males, i.e., research that has a clear goal and impact on poverty. This kind of research would not only allow us to understand the processes that create impoverished conditions, but would also document ways to reverse these trends.

Policy Interventions

There is a dearth of interventions conducted in Latino communities that impact Latino males, however, what we do not know is the degree to which these interventions are reversing negative trends and creating new access and opportunity for social and economic mobility. The scholars proposed specific interventions that should be put in place and outlined a series of steps that would assist in defining the effect of these interventions. The following represents the steps outlined by the scholars:

1. Review interventions for Latino youth, particularly Latino men. After reviewing interventions, successful programs should be identified to understand the conditions for successful intervention.
2. The usage of an ecological model to conduct research on the interventions and what are the conditions of the interventions that illicit change. Interventions should be conceptualized and carried out in partnerships with communities that are subject to intervention (community psychology approach). This approach calls for community-based assessment. In other words, communities should be an integral part in assessing their own needs. This work should be conducted working in partnership with researchers. This approach allows for the inclusion of community subjects, bolstering agency among its constituents, and hinders hierarchical power dynamics between researchers and subjects. Scholars also advocated for the use of the human development model. In other words, use life-course as primary in intervention design. The importance of longitudinal designs in interventions was paramount, particularly if the work will center around 16-26-year-old males (young people). However, some scholars opined that earlier (i.e., children at younger ages) interventions might be more beneficial.
3. Scholars emphasized the importance of clearly defined goals for interventions. As such, the goals' scope should be reduced to manageable interventions with clearly defined outcomes, rather than broad goals. To carry out the interventions, scholars suggested the use of the

family-based approach. Families should be the unit of analysis. This approach avoids the male-female gender dichotomy.

4. Interventions, scholars argued, should focus on building capacity through the inclusion of multi-sector collaboration. Scholars argued that institutional (as well as individual) buy-in would be necessary to create long-term change. The inclusion of neighborhood stakeholders will support the maintenance of the intervention impact beyond the intervention timeline. The focus of specific, manageable outcomes stems from a pragmatic position among scholars. They emphasize the importance of politically feasible work that capitalizes on public outcry. Scholars also called for the inclusion of economics and political scientists to carry out this work. In other words, multidisciplinary collaboration was necessary for successful conceptualization and implementation of intervention

In sum, Latino males find themselves conspicuously overrepresented in certain negative categories – those who drop out of school, are incarcerated, and murdered, to name a few – and are underrepresented in other categories associated with success – those who earn advanced university degrees, high incomes, or rise to positions of political leadership. The concern that arises from forum gathering is the pervasive nature of disenfranchisement among Latino males and boys ages 15 to 35 in the United States. The two-day forum served as an effective starting point for identifying critical gaps in knowledge and research related to the status of Latino males. While this summary report does not by itself begin to fill this gap, it is our hope that it will serve as an effective call to scholars, policymakers, and funders for the need to engage in and support, ongoing research on the status of Latino males and development of targeted interventions for this population.

Endnotes

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- ¹ The terms Latino and Hispanics will be used interchangeably in this document. However, the author recognizes the political and conceptual difference between these two terms. Hispanics remains the most often used nomenclature to categorize people who were born or whose families were born in a country in Latin America.
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- ³ G. Orfield and C. Lee, *Racial transformation and the changing nature of segregation*. (Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2006).
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- ⁵ Fry, Richard. "The High Schools Hispanics Attend: Size and Other Key Characteristics." Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, November 1, 2005.
- ⁶ NAEP, Fourth and Eighth Grade Reading Scores. 2007
- ⁷ NAEP, Fourth and Eighth Grade Reading Scores. 2007
- ⁸ Winters, J. and Greene, M. (2006). *Leaving Boys Behind*. (New York: Manhattan Institute, 2006).
- ⁹ *National Center for Education Statistics. Status and Trends of Racial/Ethnic Minorities, 2004*
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- ¹² G. Borjas, *The New Face of the Low-Wage Workforce*. (National Poverty Center, 2007).
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2006.
- ¹⁵ Ibid..
- ¹⁶ Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2006.
- ¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2006, Ethnicity and Ancestry Statistics Branch, Population Division.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Census Bureau. *Income, Poverty and Health Coverage in the United States: 2004*.
- ²¹ US Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Prisoners in 2006.
- ²² US Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999-2006.
- ²³ Harrison, Paige M. and Beck, Allen J. (2006). *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005*. Number of Inmates in State or Federal Prison and Local Jails per 100,000 Residents, By Gender, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Age, June 30, 2005. Tables 13 and 12. United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/pjim05.htm>
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- ²⁵ US Center on Disease Control and Prevention. National Vital Statistics Report. Mortality Tables. 2004
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- ³⁰ US Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. 2007
- ³¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Census Bureau. *Income, Poverty and Health Coverage in the United States: 2004*.
- ³² CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table HI08, <http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032006/health/toc.htm>
- ³³ US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2004.