Educational experiences of Latinas: Lessons of resistance

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In response to the low levels of educational attainment Ibero convened a Latino Youth Task force in December 2008 to address the issue of student dropouts.

The invisibility of Latina/o students has been a major concern for Ibero. Concerns about Latina/o students have been documented in two major reports - Access for Hispanics to Opportunities Results in Achievement (AHORA) (1986 & 1999).
Review of Data – Phase I

• School Records -- Longitudinal school record database for all 6th and 9th graders from 2003-2004 to 2006-2007 with information about enrollment and grade level status, grades, and test scores.

• 31 Student and Parent/Guardian Bilingual Focus Groups
• Conducted November 2009 – April 2010
• 95 students (ages 11-18)
  – 7 high schools (including several schools within schools)
  – 3 of the local higher education institutions
  – Former RCSD students (either transfer or drop-out)
• 41 parent/guardians
• 9 community sites
Review of Report I: Findings

Findings fall into the following categories:

• Drop-out
  – Personal Factors
  – School Factors
    • ISSUES OF VIOLENCE
      – Environmental Factors
• Persistence
  – Personal Factors
  – School Factors
  – Environmental Factors
• Transition Factors
• Educational Aspirations
Why a follow-up with the Latinas?

• Focus groups revealed high prevalence of fighting among Latinas.
• Within RCSD data, Latina students are the young women with higher overall suspension rates when compared to male racial/ethnic counterparts.
• Despite having high educational aspirations, over 40% of Latinas nationally do not graduate from high school.
• Nationally, many Latinas report that their postsecondary expectations are lower than their aspirations, indicating a disconnect between goals and expectations.
• For those Latinas who do matriculate into college, they remain “underrepresented in all levels of formal education attainment,” which includes advanced degrees (González, 2007 p. 291).
Review of Data – Phase II

1. What factors influence Latina students’ transition (or lack thereof) between high school and college?
2. What factors influence Latina students’ transition (or lack thereof) in college?
3. How are Latina students’ higher education experiences influenced by acts of violence in high school?
4. What implications should student affairs practitioners take into account when working with Latinas who have been impacted by acts of violence?

- 16 Latinas interviewed individually
- Included sophomores, juniors, seniors, and recent graduates
Factors Influencing the Transition of Latinas into Higher Education

- Latinas are misrepresented and shaped by various oppressive structures; they endure an educational system that is laced with stereotypical notions (like sexual promiscuity) hindering their achievement and opportunities to matriculate into college (Cammarota 2004).
- Latinas internalize master narratives and racism perpetuated by systems (media and education) (Davila, 2008).
- Impacted by “pedagogy of control” (Moll, 2004) – schools’ legacies of suffocating diversity and enacting structural power over Latinas.
- Inequitable distribution of resources in schools can be considered a form of “structural violence” (Garcia-Reid, 2008).
Conceptual Framework

• **Symbolic Violence (Bourdieu, 1990)**
  – A product of structures of domination, which leads to “systematic self-depreciation” (p. 339).
  – Relates to the gendering of males as perpetrators and the reciprocal, the female as victim and results in female subjectivity.

• **Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998)**
  – Provides an opportunity for Latinas to tell and analyze their life stories about educational experiences and resistance.
  – Chicana feminist epistemology specifically acknowledges participants’ realities as the “foundation of knowledge” (p. 558) and considers “how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized” (p. 560).
Conceptual Framework

1. Frameworks point to the resistance of the gendering of females as victims in patriarchal dominant societies.

2. Frameworks highlight the intersections between gender positions and power and how these relationships (re)construct different opportunity structures for individuals.

3. Frameworks center the context of the classroom and school as a socially constructed place functioning to isolate certain groups. It is with this general understanding we look at the journeys of Latina middle and high school students.
Findings

• Forms of Violence:
  – Stereotypes as Violence: Resisting the “Baby Machine” mentality
  – The Environment as Violence: Finding Safe Spaces to Resist
  – Physical Forms of Violence: Fighting for Respeto

• Higher Education aspirations

• Impact of violence on the transition into higher education

• Words of wisdom from Latinas to student affairs practitioners
Resisting the “Baby Machine” Mentality

Sofia jumped into the conversation, “To me it’s not that serious. I mean, okay, I’m still a virgin, but when I say it people act like it’s a disease...I’m proud to say it.” Sofia’s words encouraged another student, Lupe to quietly state, “I am too.” Lupe reinforced her desire to remain focused and graduate,

“Six years in high school and I still am [a virgin], and everybody's like, "Oh, you still that?" and I'm like, "Yup, and I'm proud of it." My mind is not set to have sex right now, I just wanna graduate.”
The Environment as Violence: Finding Safe Spaces to Resist

But you hear outside. Let's just say, I go to sleep listening to that noise (police sirens) every day. From what it was the first time I moved here, it was good. You could go out and have fun – go out and not worry about any drama or fighting. I don't go to clubs anymore because every time there's always a fight about something little. I'm the type of person, if I go out, I wanna be able to have fun and not worry about a bullet coming from each angle.
Physical Forms of Violence: Fighting for Respeto

Yo no peleo namá por los rumores porque a mi no me importa, las palabras se la lleva el viento. Pero algunas veces, es que, hay como te digo, es para que tenga tu respeto.

[I don’t really fight over rumors because I don’t care, the wind can take words but it’s about, you know, how do you say, it’s about getting your respect.]
Higher Education Aspirations

... I was supposed to go to something about setting me up for college or whatever, but I never got to go to but I just feel like they should have been setting us up for college when we were in the 8th grade. Just because you’re rushing with the seniors, that means like they don’t pay attention too much because I took a math class that I didn’t need to have and I could have passed it, you know....
Higher Education Aspirations

I don’t want to go to college for two years, I want to go for more because college for two years, yeah, you’re going to college but it’s only two years and you can do way more if you go longer and get a better degree. Like everybody goes to college for two years. I really don’t know I just think I just want to make my mom proud to say yea my daughter is doing it and she’s getting good money.
Impact of Violence on Transition into Higher Education

To me, everything is based in the student, because the decisions are chosen by the student. If you choose that you want to fool around and skip classes and fight, and argue, that is up to you, but if you decide to move forward and learn and attend the class, to me that depends on the student. Depends on who is the student and depends on what way he/she selects. And the influence to the student to make decisions comes from friends versus family. So, all of that goes back to your parents how they influence you, who knows how to control you better, I think that this is the best answer that I can give you.
Impact of Violence on Transition into Higher Education

Yes, in my senior year there was a police in school, and whoever caused problems was detained, without coming back to school. They gave him/her, I think that they gave him/her GTI but for all the school year, not like before that they gave you one week, two or three months and then you came back. So, I think that this has calmed the students down because it is not the same now than it was before.
What Student Affairs Practitioners Should Know

I think based on statistics they know that those who make it to college, probably they’re like well she made it, you know, but I think they should know that if we made it that far it’s because we’re serious about our education and that we want to better ourselves. So I think that they should try and help as much as possible ...I mean we can offer a lot, especially being a lot of us are bilingual and just our culture and many of us have been raised like good. I know a lot of Latinas like myself that are on the right track that are serious about school. I mean those who are not, but there’s also a select few that are, so that if we make it to college I think that that should mean a lot to them.
What Student Affairs Practitioners Should Know

They need to know that if we made it that far for a lot of us it means a lot. I know like a lot of Latinas that they don’t see college, they just say oh I can’t afford college, and like it’s a big step. If you like I said, if you’re a Latina and you made it to college you like took a really big step forward, so yeah I think professors [and administrators] can get to know us and see what we’re about.
What Student Affairs Practitioners Should Know

Well we do see a lot of Latinas, you know, outside you see them and they’re like some of them have kids and, you know, and it doesn’t look right for us, you know. But I would like them to know that not all Latinas have kids at an early age. Sometimes you may think it’s their kid, but it could really be their sister, taking them to a park, you know. That just because we’re Latinas or Latinos you shouldn’t judge us, you know, we can still do the same work if you give us a chance.
Discussion

• Have you encountered similar experiences or stories with the Latinas that you work with?
  – How does structural or symbolic violence affect Latinas on your campus?
  – How are Latinas silenced?
  – In what ways are Latinas resisting?
  – What can you do to create a more inclusive, non-violent space for Latinas on your campus?

• How might our conception of violence and the findings inform how you work with Latinas?
Implications: Violence Among Latinas

- *Respeto* equates to challenging the system and the multi-faceted violence embedded within it.
- Survival ensures *respeto*, yet these Latinas also balance strong academic identities used to combat deficit expectations.
- Deficit expectations or deviant identities should not be placed on Latinas if they have encountered issues of fighting.
- Violence occurs inside and outside of school walls and can affect future educational opportunities like college.
- Know Latinas’ history, home, and community contexts.
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