

Academic Socialization Experiences of Latina Doctoral Students

A Qualitative Understanding of Support Systems That Aid and Challenges That Hinder the Process

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Abstract: This article examines the experiences of academic socialization for Latina doctoral students. Thirteen 1- to 2-hour semistructured interviews were conducted with Latina doctoral students attending U.S. research institutions who had been in their programs for 3 or more years. Through production theory, a phenomenological analytic approach of Latina doctoral experiences was conducted. Findings include support systems, challenges, resistance methods, and issues with claiming their academic voice. The article concludes with policy implications and a discussion.

Resumen: Este artículo examina las experiencias de socialización académica de estudiantes Latinas en doctorado. Trece entrevistas semi-estructuradas de una a dos horas se llevaron a cabo con estudiantes Latinas que asisten instituciones de investigación en E. U. A. y las cuales tenían tres años o más en su programa de doctorado. Se condujeron aproximaciones analíticas fenomenológicas de las experiencias doctorales de Latinas a través de la teoría de producción. Los hallazgos incluyeron sistemas de apoyo, retos, métodos de resistencia, y asuntos sobre el reclamo de voz académica. El artículo concluye con implicaciones, discusión y política.

Keywords: *higher education; Latinas; doctoral students; academic socialization; qualitative*

As of March 2002, there were 37.4 million (13.3% of the U.S. population) Latinas/os¹ in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). This makes Latinas/os the largest minority group in the country. Overall, in 2000, Latinas/os accounted for only about 11.5% of all high school graduates, 9.5% of all college

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participants, and 6% of all students who attained bachelor's degrees; data for the 2000-2001 U.S. Latina/o population show that 0.26% enrolled in graduate school, 0.06% attained master's degrees, and 0.003% attained doctorates (Harvey, 2004). These dismal numbers make Latinas/os the least educated minority group in the United States and part of the reason that all parts of the Latino educational pipeline need further examination and reform (González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003).

Furthermore, of the 40,744 doctoral degrees conferred in 2001, women earned 45% and racial and ethnic minorities earned approximately 10%. Of the doctorates that went to women, 59.1% were for Whites, 5.7% for African Americans, 3.6% for Asian Americans, 3.5% for Latinas/os, and 0.5% for American Indians (Harvey, 2004).² Given this dismal data on Latinas, it is imperative to undertake a study to gain further understanding into the root causes of their successes and failures in doctoral education.

For the purpose of this article, the formulation of the concept *academic socialization* comes from Friere's (1970) concept of prescription, which he defined as the imposition of the oppressor's choices over those of the oppressed for purposes of transforming the consciousness of the oppressed. Applying this concept to the Latinas in this study can help to clarify their lived realities within higher education institutions as they have explained their challenges with attaining opportunities and overall struggles. Academic socialization also hinders Latina agency through a systematic and covert acculturation process that I refer to as being socialized into the academy. It is within these academic socialization processes that the academy works to systematically and covertly challenge the cultural foundations that Latinas bring with them to the institution. As data show, as recent as 2001 Latinas were struggling to keep pace with other women and racial and ethnic groups in terms of doctoral attainment (Harvey, 2004), and an analysis of academic socialization can help to explain this phenomenon.

Purpose

This article is not one directly focused on examining the educational pipeline for Latinas. Instead, it examines how academic socialization contributes to the success or failure of Latina doctoral students. Specifically, this study focuses on the possible opportunities and challenges that are presented in the mixing of academic culture and Latina culture to understand Latinas' views on their underrepresentation at the doctoral level. This dissection of academic socialization at the doctoral level will provide an in-depth inquiry on the relationships and conflicts that exist for Latinas—conflicts that may be partly attributed to their low participation in the academy.

Few empirical studies exist on the academic socialization of Latina doctorates. Of the existing literature, a large part focuses on women in the academy, Latinas in undergraduate education, and analyses of how higher education can best serve

minority women. Only a few studies focus on Latina doctoral students, their experiences, their definitions of success and failure, and their reactions to graduate education socialization. Whereas this is partly due to the historical underrepresentation of Latinas in doctoral education, presently there exist a sufficient number to support additional research about their doctoral educational experiences. In general, this study will add to the existing research on Latinas in the academy via a phenomenological analysis of the Latina doctoral experience. Of specific interest is how Latina doctorates conceptualize their identities at their institutions and how ethnicity, gender, and class affect their lives and survival at institutions of higher education.

Research Question

The general question guiding this research is as follows:

What are the educational experiences of Latina doctoral students at predominately White institutions, and how have they responded to academic socialization?

Going through the process of attaining a doctorate in preparation for academic life equates to getting socialized into being academic. It is this aspect of doctoral education and its relation to being Latina that will be examined. Therefore, the intent of this research is to help further explain opportunities and challenges that nurture and inhibit Latinas' education goals and aspirations in light of doctoral academic socialization at predominately White institutions. The intent of this research is to show how the academic journeys of Latinas have a unique purpose and mission that may conflict with academic socialization at the doctoral level.

Review of Literature

Why has the status quo on minority women's graduate education remained largely unchanged? Some argue that part of the problem lies in the influence of men on the academic enterprise and its hierarchical and elitist rules of success. Within this sphere of male influence, women's perspectives have historically been ignored. Therefore, there was a conscious decision to focus the literature review on Latina voices through empirical research. Within this focus, there exists some literature on how they have persisted in graduate education, but additional research is needed in this area as focusing on success models helps to reconceptualize their experiences and how best to improve the pipeline at the doctoral level of education. Also, there exists vast literature on how and why Latinas fail in graduate education—it is important to begin to address institutional structures that hinder Latina graduate educational attainment.

First, on characteristics of successful Latinas, Gándara's (1982) research shows that Latinas from low socioeconomic backgrounds that were high educational

achievers in graduate and professional school attended integrated K-12 schools. Family support is also of central importance, particularly the emotional support from the student's immediate family (Gándara, 1982; Gonzalez, 2002), partners (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995), and strong mothers who guide and provide themselves as models of success (Gándara, 1982). Other important factors in overcoming hostile institutions included rejecting and resisting institutional messages about their academic unworthiness (Morales, 1988) and connecting with mentors (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995; Singh & Stoloff, 2003; Solorzano, 1993). Finally, research findings from the literature show that being grounded in one's cultural background and identity is important to success in graduate school (Castellanos, 1996).

Second, on challenges faced by Latina graduate students, Karen (1991) documented the lack of academic preparation and skills because of poor K-12 education as a factor. In terms of financial challenges, the two most important are a lack of financial support from academic institutions (Solorzano, 1993) and financial struggles due to low socioeconomic origins (Gándara, 1982, 1995). The most notable and underlying factor Latina doctoral students face is discrimination based on class, gender, race, and ethnicity (Castellanos, 1996; Ibarra, 1996; Solorzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993). Family responsibilities also are documented in the literature as a challenge, particularly those experienced by students with partners to consider (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995), and isolation from families because of cultural dissonance when family and university cultures clash (González et al., 2001).

At the level of the institution, Cuádriz (1992, 1993) and Solorzano (1993) addressed stigmatization issues. González, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2002) and Morales (1988) documented challenges of hostile and racist academic environments. At the department level, challenges include a lack of mentors and role models (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995; González et al., 2002; Solorzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993), tokenization by peers (Gonzalez, 2002), marginalization by professors and departments (Solorzano, 1993), and low expectation from professors (Solorzano, 1993).

Table 1 below provides an overview of the relevant literature reviewed. The first column provides an overview of characteristics found in the literature that are important in helping Latinas as they enter graduate school and persist through the attainment of the doctorate. The second column provides an overview of types of challenges Latina graduate students are likely to struggle with through graduate school. A comparison of these two columns is important for addressing pipeline issues that plague Latinas before and through graduate school. These are all-important issues that need to be addressed if institutions are to secure a pipeline for the production and success of Latina doctorates—a group of women whose scholarship could be essential to the Latina/o community, increased diversification of university environments, production of new knowledge, and democracy and social justice in American society.

In summary, in the past two decades, some scholars have taken interest in research about Latina retention and success within institutions of higher education.

Table 1
Conceptual Model of Latina Doctorates Navigating
Through Higher Education

Helpful Characteristics	Challenges to Overcome
Attendance at integrated K-12 schools	Lack of academic preparation as a result of poor K-12 education
Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional support • Supportive partners • Strong mothers in their lives to guide them and provide them with models of success 	Financial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support from institutions • Low socioeconomic origins
Institution-wide <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistant to messages of their academic unworthiness • Have mentors 	Discrimination based on class, gender, race, and ethnicity Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibilities of students with partners • Isolation from family because of cultural dissonance
Strong cultural backgrounds and identities	Institution-wide <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigmatization • Perceptions of hostile academic environments Department- or program-based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of mentors and role models • Tokenization by peers • Marginalization by professors and departments • Low expectations from professors
	Unmotivated because of complexity of challenges

However, the bulk of the research focuses on Latinas at the undergraduate level. When scholars have taken interest in the retention and success of Latina graduate students, research findings are mostly presented as institutional recommendations and not as central research questions. From the research insights that exist on institutional recommendations for improved Latina retention in the process of attaining doctorates, some researchers do address the socialization process of the doctorate as an institution in need of change for the purpose of accommodating diverse student populations. But mostly the research that makes institutional recommendations is not so specific as to address the institutional social mores that govern the socialization of doctoral students. Some academics also are interested in doing research to understand the experiences of women of color, particularly Latina doctoral students because of the observable dilemma of Latina faculty underrepresentation. Nevertheless, whether graduate education for Latinas can be improved by the provocation of institutional

change or by women demanding change and equality, it is clear that presently many of their graduate experiences are negative and in need of serious attention.

Theoretical Framework

Production theory was used to frame this study because it provides a comprehensive theoretical paradigm that has been developed over time by social scientists to compensate for reproduction theories that offered insufficient and incomplete explanations to social phenomena. These theories offer theoretical and social understandings that not only take into consideration the power of institutions to govern and socialize individuals but the will of individuals to resist and have influence on the outcomes of their own destinies. Whereas these theoretical perspectives take into consideration the possibility of student resistance for purposes of social change, there are two major strands—phenomenological theory and Marxist critical theory. The phenomenological strand has been the most criticized for lack of a balanced consideration for both structure and human agency as determiners of social, political, or cultural outcomes. Critics call the phenomenological strand reductionistic, arguing that it focuses on the grand aspect of human agency and determines it as the sole force causing all social, political, cultural, and educational outcomes. On the other hand, Marxist critical theory (i.e., critical theory), also a brand of production theory, remedies this imbalance by giving consideration to the power of structure on the production of new meaning, identities, knowledge, and institutional mores. Critical theorists are of the belief that society is oppressive and that its oppressive nature can be changed via the power of human agency and the development of critical consciousness.

In sum, Table 2 provides an overview of the theory types, structure-human agency balance, views on the schooling enterprise, and critiques of the aforementioned theoretical framework. It is the theoretical concept of this second strand of production theory that guided this study's data analysis because it is comprehensive in taking into consideration the power of institutions to govern and socialize individuals and the will of the individual to resist and have influence on the outcome of his or her own destiny. Specifically, the theoretical work of Gramsci (1971), Freire (1970), and Weiler (1988) were of central importance in conceptualizing and analyzing the academic lives and experiences of Latina doctoral students. During the data analysis, the data were filtered through the following theoretical concepts presented in their work: (a) the idea of organic intellectual, (b) the spirit of counterhegemonic institutions, (c) the philosophy of oppression, (d) the process of prescription (i.e., socialization), and (e) the power of voice.

Why is the consideration of agency important in this study? Because it helps explain the resistance of doctoral students of color to doctoral socialization. Without resistance to oppressive socialization processes, students are reduced to becoming homogenized selves that mirror the values, beliefs, ideas, and ways of thinking of

Table 2
Overview of Production Theory

	Phenomenology (Antipositivistic)	Marxist Critical Theory (Social Justice Focus)
Structure vs. human agency	Structure is underestimated and underemphasized.	Structure and human agency are balanced.
Views on schooling	Schooling practices should not matter because they do not control students' destinies. Anyone can have school success if he or she wants it.	Schools and students both have control over the eventuality of student outcomes. However, schools still need to be transformed to better accommodate student needs.
Critiques	It is reductionistic and has an overemphasis on human agency.	It underemphasizes racial, ethnic, and gendered structural oppression.

their socializers. This can be positive or negative depending on the values that are being transmitted—that is, the traditional social underpinning of academic institutions, such as racism, classism, and sexism, are not values that working-class Latinas so easily embrace. Therefore, whereas a successful socialization process is critical for a successful graduate career (i.e., the attainment of the doctorate), a socialization by mostly White and male professors can create cultural, social, racial and ethnic, class, or gender-based conflicts for Latinas “because graduate school is a social as well as academic experience” (Russell, 2003, p. 46).

The multidimensionality of oppressive structures such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity that exist for Latinas encapsulate nuances that give way to a complex Latina consciousness that is simultaneously informed by the hegemonic power structure, history (U.S. and Mexican), and human agency. For Latinas, this consciousness allows them to simultaneously live in multiple worlds, analyze these worlds from multiple perspectives, and initiate their agency and resistance. The concept of organic intellectual was used because some Latinas talked about their knowledge-base coming from the academy, the community, their families, or any combination of these, and these nuances need to be paid attention to. The concept of counter-hegemonic institutions was given close attention to gain greater understanding as to how they view the academy as an institution that can help them further their social, political, and cultural purposes. Oppression was used as a basis to gain further insight into the interviewee’s philosophical underpinnings about the nature of academic institutions and their relationship to its institutional structures. Prescription (i.e., academic socialization) was applied to understand nuances of the doctoral experience and positive or negative feelings toward it. Voice was applied to understand

differences that are explained by the interviewees between themselves and others. Along with the works of production theorists, the works of Cuádriz (1992) and Turner (2002) were used because they consider race and ethnicity as central to the experience of academics of color.

Method

This study was qualitative, a method best suited to understanding the specificity of a social process taking place such as a diverse group of Latinas with somewhat different experiences. Qualitative research methods are most appropriate for the examination of the nuances of human behavior in its social context, and although they can generate multiple interpretations and realities, the data collected captures the complexity of the human experience, which quantitative methods often fail to capture (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Thirteen 1- to 2-hour semistructured interviews were conducted with Latina doctoral students attending mostly public research institutions in the United States who had been in their programs for 3 or more years. Advanced doctoral students were selected to get an understanding of Latina experiences close to the end of their programs. The participants were asked open-ended questions related to their experiences and interpretations of the academic environment. In this structure, they were able to lead the interviewer into the most important aspects and experiences of their lives and interpretations. Also, interviewees completed a survey that asked about their educational career paths, degrees, fields of study, and how they self-identified in terms of race and ethnicity.

The research sites included four national conferences—Gathering at the River: Women of Color in the Arizona Academy, National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, American Educational Research Association, and the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Institutions in which interviewees were attaining their doctorates included Arizona State University, Harvard University, Stanford University, University of California's Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of New Mexico, and University of Texas–Austin. No assumption was made about the ethnic self-identification of interviewees. This liberty in self-identification was important because labeling them can undermine differences in their socioeconomic status, ancestry, history, and language (Medina & Luna, 2000). Self-identification in the Latina community is politically loaded because of the history of oppression and marginalization associated with some terms.

Rapport was established with all the women prior to the interviews. The interviewer established a professional relationship with many of the women that were interviewed through interaction at conferences during the past 4 years. Many other women were recommended to the interviewee by these initial contacts because they fit the criteria: being advanced doctoral students and belonging to the Latina community. Most of

the interviewees either had some prior professional connection to the researcher, his mentors, or his colleagues.

Description of Interviewees

In self-identifying, the majority of the interviewees used the term *Latina*; therefore, it is the term used to describe the women who participated in this study. *Latina* generally identifies bicultural and bilingual women who reside and have been educated in the United States.

Other terms that were also highly used were *Chicana* and *Hispanic*. The former connotes (a) women from Mexican parents or descent that have generally been raised in the Southwest who are politically, socially, and culturally conscious; (b) pride in membership to a strong and cohesive political and intellectual academic community; and (c) people of Mexican origin, whether born in the United States or Mexico (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). The latter is mostly used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census to identify individuals of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or some other Hispanic origin of any race (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000), and it is generally associated “with a history of colonialism and continued new-colonist action by the U.S. government” (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000, p. 512). Other descriptors interviewees used to self-identify in terms of race and ethnicity included Puerto Rican, Afro-Latina, Chicana Feminist, *Fronteriza*, indigenous identified Chicana, Chicana de Latin America, and American of Mexican descent. In most cases, these were given as secondary terms of identification by Latinas who identified as Latina or Chicana.

Five interviewees described traditional paths, defined as having initial goals of becoming academics and pursuing their education through the PhD without stopping for work or reasons unrelated to education. Five described nontraditional paths, meaning they did not complete their education through the PhD without leaving the academy at some point for work or career-related reasons. Some reasons given included family and work responsibilities. The last three women said they began their education at the community college. This is not to say that some women were more committed to education than others but merely stated to describe paths to the doctorate.

In talking about their K-12 schooling experiences during the interviews, four attended mostly Latino schools, two attended mostly White schools, two attended racially integrated schools, one attended a Catholic girls preparatory school, and four did not say. Three were born and raised in California, four in Arizona, three in Texas, two in Michigan, and one in Colorado. None were raised by single parents. In regards to their parents' home language, six said only Spanish, two said bilingual (Spanish and English), and five did not say. The majority of parents (11 of 13) were of Mexican descent, one had mixed parents, and one said they were from Central America.

Overview of Findings

Findings detail support structures and challenges that are more extensive than those documented in the literature. Most of these support systems and challenges are similar to those experienced by the general population of doctoral students, particularly students of color, but some are specific to the Latina/o community.

Positive Experiences and Support Systems

Positive doctoral experiences were first and foremost related to academic preparation prior to graduate school, and positive prescription experiences in their K-12 education helped Latinas develop early confidence in their academic abilities. More positive associate's, bachelor's, and master's experiences led to more positive doctoral experiences. As stated by one doctoral student,

When I was in undergrad and during the master's, it was about a youthful excitement about learning new information and dissecting it. My experience was about taking it in, seeing how it works for me, and finding this comfortable place with knowledge.

Second, there were specific institution-wide support systems that students mentioned as having a positive effect on their doctoral experiences. These included being awarded financial opportunities in the forms of scholarships and fellowships. Also, being exposed to a new region of the country by leaving home to attain the doctorate created the opportunity for new knowledge. One student said,

The positive about leaving home is that I have been exposed to a whole new region. Coming to this school has exposed me to [this state]. Also, intellectually, I see it as a new and different type of intellectual discourse.

Several students talked about the benefits of institution-wide diversity. Some explained that being at welcoming campuses that nurtured and supported their cultural identities provided them with comfortable and positive experiences when they were far from home. One stated,

It's exciting just being in a campus where you take so many things for granted—the fact that everyone eats green chili and that you can get breakfast burritos around. Just the culture, and the flavor, and the salsa music every now and then. It's something you notice when you go to less diverse parts of the country, the lack of brown people, the lack of Spanish. . . . It feels nice to know that it's something I'm going to miss horribly when I leave.

Third, department-wide support systems included belonging to departments with diverse students, peers, and faculty. Diverse faculty members are more likely to

expose students to a diverse curriculum, and students mentioned that getting exposed to curriculum that at least includes the work of scholars of color, regardless of its eurocentric leaning, was part of having positive doctoral experiences. Other aspects of departmental support that led to positive doctoral experiences included getting opportunities for intellectual development through the research and teaching assistantships and getting support for professionalization activities, such as attendance at national conferences. As one student stated,

I can't say that being Latina in our department is a positive or a negative. Although, as I pursue my studies, they seem to be receptive, encouraging, and supportive of the fact that I want to study Latino issues and do my research around those issues. I don't really see them going out of their way to enhance that experience for me, but they are supportive, so that's good.

Overall, students that got opportunities to build communities with similarly thinking students and faculty of color across their institutions, in their departments, and in the local community had the most positive doctoral experiences because they felt less conflict between their institutions and cultural identities. These students also talked about having more emotional and financial support from their families.

Negative Experiences and Challenges

Latina doctoral students stated that poor K-12 academic preparation, undesired cultural assimilation, and overt and covert racism set the tone for educational challenges as undergraduates and through graduate school. Latinas particularly focused on their master's experiences when talking about barriers and negative experiences. One stated,

The master's was just a god-awful experience. . . . Most of it was just really shitty. I remember getting in and our cohort consisted of nine of us, and the general feeling that I got from most professors in the department was that they didn't give a shit. It really sucked. I can't believe I was so stupid, dumb, and naïve. I really thought that I would get here and because people were educated they wouldn't be so damn racist, but they were.

The women that talked about cultural isolation and tokenism stated that this began at the master's level of their education and many times continued into the PhD. And whereas some women mentioned leaving home as positive and intellectually challenging, those that had negative experiences said that moving away from the family amplified their feelings of isolation and made it difficult for their families to see their daughters leave. One student explained her experience as follows:

In being a doctoral student, you're getting cut off from your community both 'cause you're sort of physically at the university, but also the constraints that being a doctoral

student puts on you cuts you off from your community. . . . That's sort of the price or the negative things about being a doctoral student.

A particular set of challenges at the institution level were also mentioned. These included a lack of financial support even from prestigious institutions; discrimination based on race, gender, and class; stigmatization and tokenism, as they were expected to be the experts on minority affairs; a hostile climate or environment, not receptive to or understanding of their needs or culture; navigating institutional politics, in a sense the most hidden of the doctoral education curriculum; perceived expectations and double standards—many women were told (directly or indirectly) they needed to do twice as much work and be twice as good to survive; having their authority challenged by students, if and when they served as teaching assistants, usually in courses dealing with diversity; feeling under-respected and in need of constantly proving themselves; difficulties with claiming their voice in their doctoral seminars, with professors, and in their writing; and cultural dissonance and isolation as they are torn between family, community, and the academy. One student felt a lot of these challenges at the institutional level and protected herself by disengaging and trying to get in and out as fast as possible. She stated,

I came to graduate school with a shield. . . . I felt like I needed something to protect me because I'm going into a school where I knew it was going to be basically all White, and I wasn't sure how I was going to be perceived by other students. So I kind of needed to protect myself.

Department-wide, Latinas experienced a different set of challenges. Some lacked mentorship and collegial support, and a few advanced doctoral students had a hard time thinking of anyone who had mentored them. Most mentioned experiencing tokenization by peers, particularly in the classroom where they were asked to speak for all Latinas. Marginalization, discrimination, tokenism, and low expectations by professors in and out of the classroom did not improve their perceptions of their doctoral experiences. Racially hostile classroom environments, an overexposure to dominant Eurocentric curriculum, and negative research and teaching assistantship experiences added to the creation of hostile academic experiences. Not one voice can represent the complexity of challenges that Latina doctorates experience in their departments. One student's summary of experiences best explains how these negative experiences can lead to attrition:

There was one Chicana just last year who had it out with a professor and it was so terrible. It was a communication problem they couldn't resolve. This was a woman who was about to take her comprehensive exams, and she was so devastated by the experience that she takes off. She didn't give up. She interprets it as, "Fuck them, I'm resisting! I don't have to take this bullshit! I'm out of here!" That was her attitude. And when I heard this story I was like, "They defeated her! Why did she split?" But then I took a

step back and I understood—she felt very alone. She was the only Chicana in the department, and I'm the only Chicana in the department right now. . . . So I can understand why she split. I'm getting ready to split, too.

In addition to all these academic challenges, students that mostly remembered the negative experiences also mentioned the difficulties of having to juggle the demands of doctoral education with familial responsibilities. Almost all of the interviewees mentioned having to care for partners, children, parents, and siblings.

Latina Resistance to Academic Socialization

When Latinas were confronted with academic socialization whose purpose was to convert them, they found it to be problematic when they had their own sense of purpose and duty. The stronger and more aware they were of their ethnic identities, the more resistant they were to academic socialization. The primary critique was not in regard to their conversion into academics because this process was in place for all doctoral students, but that academic socialization had a default assumption that all students fit the same mold and the prototype of the end product mirrored the characteristics of White males. They responded with resistance—methods that had been created and supported by their Latina academic predecessors. Resistance helped them survive the academy from within and allowed them to create networks with other academics that had similar feelings about doctoral socialization conflicting with their culture and academic purpose.

The networks of resistance that they created with similar-minded academics across their institutions and the United States were through Latina/o cultural institutions and national conferences. This critical mass of Latina/o academics expressed part of their academic purpose as being Latino-centered. And not all Latinas were resistant to academic socialization. The less resistant women found some practical purposes in the socialization process and searched for new ways to interact with the academic system—ways that perhaps allowed them the benefits of becoming academic and at the same time resist aspect of the system that inherently aimed to strip them of their Latina identity. As stated by one student, “you cannot avoid being changed by the doctorate process, even if you try to resist the academic socialization to the fullest extent. And I've both been changed for the good and the bad.”

Successful resistance. Latinas were successful when they were integrated with similar-minded scholars who supported and encouraged their resistance. Some used language (i.e., Spanish) to express themselves, their ideas, and their cultural beliefs and assumptions, which were antithetical to those of the academy. Others responded to pigeon holing by addressing people's assumptions about who they should be and what they are capable of as Latina academics. This required them to reject their subordinate status and assert their equality among their peers with regards to their

academic qualification and intellectual prowess. Most said they adopted an “I have something to prove” mentality to achieve this. Most talked about becoming assertive against academic discrimination based on race, gender, and class. Those that suffered academic exploitation found supportive mentors (faculty members or other graduate students) outside of the department to confide in. In the classroom, through their interaction with the curriculum, in out-of-class peer discussions, and in their research and writing they rejected the imposition of White privilege and asserted their Latina identity. A few mentioned using their research as a type of activism for the benefit of the larger U.S. Latina/o community. Those who realized that socialization and opportunities happened in informal settings talked about inviting themselves to social events when they were excluded.

Unsuccessful resistance. Latinas were unsuccessful when the result of their resistance was isolation and marginalization. Most described academia as a political game that you must play to survive. A few talked about disengaging and skipping class when confronted with hostile professors, curricula, and peers. Several even switched academic programs to survive when the racism and hostility become unmanageable. A few mentioned giving up on resisting oppressive academic socialization and conforming to White norms. A couple struggled against deculturalization to the point of suffering health complications. Many Latinas created distance from sexist or racist colleagues and peers and became further isolated. Some suffered academic exploitation as research assistants because they did not know the culture of research and ended up doing all the work and not getting recognition. On the most negative end of the spectrum, some developed dislike and hatred for the academic enterprise because of their struggles. Those who consciously understood the purpose of social events talked about avoiding them because that was where socialization happened.

Academic Socialization = Latina Resistance = Finding or Losing Voice

When Latinas resisted academic socialization, they either found or lost their academic voice. When they found their voice, the intellectual rejuvenation made them want to remain in academia past their doctorates to make change and serve their people. Some used their Spanish in the academy to claim space and belonging among the Latina/o academic community. Gaining intellectual and social confidence was a result of finding voice. For the politically savvy Latinas, playing the academic game was empowering. When they had critical masses of Latinas/os and people of color, they confidently and articulately criticized Eurocentric knowledge construction and learned about their Latina/Chicana identity. Professorial validation was mentioned when Latinas talked about developing confidence and voice. Some built cross-race alliances for moral and intellectual support, and others adapted activist-scholar models to voice concerns about injustice and racism at the university and in

the local community. When Latinas had a strong academic voice and purpose, they discounted objections and criticisms to doing Latino-based research.

Latinas who lost their voice mentioned not having avenues to express their concerns, and this led to their marginalization and isolation. Some mentioned not having professorial support or validation. Others, as they lost confidence in their academic abilities and potential for success, talked about rethinking and downgrading their academic career desires. Feeling helpless against sexism, racism, and classism led some Latinas to adopt a “do not go against the grain” mentality. One Latina articulated her experience with academic socialization as “giving up your ethnicity is the price you pay to become an academic.” The few Latinas who completely lost their voice talked about losing confidence and becoming unsure of their knowledge. They did not speak up in class or criticize the academy because of a fear of reprisal.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study have two major implications. First, the findings have provided policymakers with an inside look into the problems with academic socialization for Latina doctoral students, and it is up to progressive policymakers to respond with increased efforts and resources to improve targeted financial aid, recruitment, and retention efforts at the institutional, state, and national levels. If policymakers are interested in improving the retention of Latina academics, they need to be concerned with how their negative socialization experiences lead to attrition and how their positive experiences lead to success. Second, institutional climate concerns need to be addressed. State and national funding needs to be made available to study successful models of institutional change that are leading the nation. Hispanic Serving Institutions can serve as good examples of work being conducted to improve Latina/o education in the United States. Nevertheless, regardless of the scope and depth of the approach, it is critical for policymakers to begin thinking about the larger systemic institutional change that is needed as opposed to the traditional thinking that assumes Latina/o culture needs to be modified to address the cultural conflicts they have with higher education institutions. If this cultural dissonance is not addressed, the long-term impact can be devastating because academic preparation at the highest levels is the foundation for a bulk of the economic, educational, social, and cultural development of the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States.

In addition to these fundamental concerns that get at the essence of needed change in institutional climate and culture, some scholars suggest that academia is presently experiencing the type of paradigm shift wherein higher education is no longer in control of the domains that homogenize students as they see fit, particularly Latinas/os who by nature of their biculturalism are becoming more selective of their acculturation to things such as academic identity (Keefe & Padilla, 1987). The belief is that

diverse students are entering institutions of higher education and forcing institutional response to and by their presence (Ibarra, 2001). As stated by Ibarra (2001),

[Latinos] are not accepting the dictum to learn in only one way, nor are they willing to give up their own cultural contexts and cognitive styles as did earlier immigrant groups in this country. The national media are watching the unique characteristics of *Generation Ñ* (pronounced EN-yay), the term used by *Newsweek* to define this rapidly growing and influential population of young Latinos in their twenties and thirties (Leland and Chambers, 1999). Although they are “changing the way this country looks, feels and thinks, eats, dances and votes, . . . they are not ‘crossing over’ into mainstream America” (Larmer, 1999, 48). (pp. 61-62)

Nevertheless, national, state, and institutional policymakers cannot be solely dependent on these microlevel changes to determine America’s future. They need to be leaders in implementing the type of macrolevel changes that will align institutional cultures with the cultures of its diverse people.

It is important to note that although Latina doctoral students experience immense challenges and oppressive academic socialization, they find support to survive, succeed, and sometimes advance into the faculty. And given the ability Latinas and other women have shown to do intellectual work at the highest level, it is surprising that institutions are slow to be inclusive of all women in all areas of scholarship. Nevertheless, Latinas and women continue to challenge long-standing assumptions about their ability for academic success, and there is hope that institutions will learn from and become interested in addressing their challenges and promote the type of institutional change that will propel their advancement. Latinas, institutions, and all those interested in advancing Latina education have challenges ahead because of the higher education legacy of oppression and marginalization (of women and students of color) that continues today in the academy. This oppressive legacy is imbedded in our institutions and popularly known as institutional racism, institutional sexism, and institutional classism. Furthermore, it continues to be practiced and taught through academic socialization.

It should be of great interest and concern to institutional leaders that Latinas—a group growing in numbers, influence, and intellectual sophistication—find higher education institutions to be oppressive and riddled with barriers that prevent or minimize their success. These barriers have extensively been documented, and as far as Latinas are concerned, they lead to their exclusion from the academy and only serve to preserve the institutional status quo that promotes racial, gender, and class hierarchy. Primarily, what is in dire need of transformation is the academic socialization process at the doctorate level although this is among one of the most difficult changes because of its imbeddedness in the academic culture.

Furthermore, it should be of great interest to institutional leaders that whereas many methods of retention, success, attrition, and challenges outlined are part of the experience of all doctoral students, this study shows their direct applicability to

Latina doctorates. Simultaneously, when underscoring the advances that have come about through the women's rights and civil rights movements it is important to remember that Latina academic advancement continues to move at a snail's pace, in part because institutional discrimination has become less overt and more covert. The hope is that all women, minorities, and those interested in learning about and improving Latina doctoral education can take something valuable from this study.

Limitations of the Study

There were three potential limitations to this study. The first was in regards to the selection of Latina doctorates primarily from the social sciences. This naturally understudied the experiences of Latinas in the physical and life sciences and professional schools. This was done because of limited time and financial constraints to establish contacts and attend conferences outside of the social sciences. Researchers and policymakers who wish to generalize the experiences of Latinas in this study to Latinas outside of the social sciences may find that some elements of their experiences apply and others do not. Generalizability was not the purpose of this study, so it must be approached with caution and care so as not to undermine the experiences of nonsocial science Latinas. The second was in regards to the gender difference between the researcher and the interviewees. The researcher has spent his entire life observing and experiencing the world from a male point of view, so this had the potential to limit the researcher's ability to understand the complexity of nuances at all stages of the research. Special attention to details was needed, and consultation with renowned female academics was sought throughout the research endeavor. Third, when interviews are the primary and only source of data, naturally there is an over-reliance on the self-reporting of experiences. As part remedy, interview data were compared with, verified through, and expanded on through an understanding of the issues found in the literature about what Latina doctoral women experience.

Notes

1. Although Census data uses the term *Hispanic* to classify people of Latin descent, for this article the terms *Latina* and *Latino* will be used. See Description of Interviewees section for further elaboration.
2. Not included in this percentile breakdown are the categories *Nonresident Alien* and *Other*.

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