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Cultural Factors that Impact Latina/o College Student Success at Predominantly-White Institutions: Past and Current Knowledge for Educators

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As the new century approached in 2000, educational leaders, practitioners, and researchers were continuing to understand the educational experiences of the fastest growing student population in the United States – Latina/os. Knowledge on factors influencing outcomes for this group were produced to inform educators. However, Latina/os continue to face barriers and challenges at all levels in their pursuit of educational opportunity, especially in higher education. The significance of the demographic shifts Latina/os bring to education should give educators a sense of urgency to better understand cultural factors that impact Latina/o student success. This paper will provide an overview of the academic literature just prior to and immediately after the new century to help understand specific cultural factors on socialization, involvement, and advancement of Latina/o college students at predominantly white institutions (PWI's).

KEYWORDS: Latina/os, college students, biculturalism, student organizations, cultural centers, student success, faculty

At the turn of the new century, national demographic patterns across the United States reported a stable to gradual decline in the participation rates of white Americans in higher education while diverse racial and ethnic populations showed a gradual increase in college participation rates (Carnevale & Fry, 2000; Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Fry & Lopez, 2012, Spring, 2016). Among these populations, Latina/o students were reported to have the most significant increase becoming the largest college-going ethnic group, comprising approximately one out of every six students attending colleges and universities in the United States soon after the first decade (Carnevale & Fry, 2000; Hurtado, Ramirez, & Cho, 2018). The change of demographics signaled a new era of educating an increasingly diverse nation (Conrad & Gasman, 2015).

Educational leadership at the turn of the new century was preparing for the impending changes that would be occurring at educational institutions nationwide. Despite forecasts that racial and ethnic groups would soon surpass Whites in college attendance, Latinas/os still accounted for less than 5% of college enrollment in 14 states (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015), held approximately 3% of all faculty positions (Wilds, 2000; NCES, 2015), and comprised roughly 8% of all student affairs and academic affairs professionals (NCES, 2016), an increase from the 1.8% Sangaria & Johnsrud (1991) approximated in their article on representation of professionals of color in the field prior to 2000.

Despite the significant nature of the demographic shifts for Latinas/os occurring in education, a sense of urgency from educators provided by these percentages was slow to develop. Effective responses to assist and support an increasingly diverse student population were for the most part reactive, rather than proactive, to the impending changes especially in higher education (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Saenz et al., 2015). Furthermore, the educational

pipeline for Latinas/os functioned at best as a mediocre mechanism for educational advancement (Saenz, Ponjuan, & Lopez Figueroa, 2016). This paper outlines research covering unique cultural aspects shaping Latina/o socialization, involvement, and advancement at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). These aspects influence higher education access, recruitment, and retention of this group at all levels. The information presented looks at how educational leadership responded to the influx of Latina/o students and how research continued to help educators understand Latina/o student success at post-secondary levels. Leadership at the PK-12 levels should be able to gain important knowledge useful for the development of initiatives and programs aimed at enhancing college participation and success for Latina/o students.

Socialization into PWIs

Ramirez's (1977) early work on developing tenets of a Chicano psychology framework asserted that social sciences described the behaviors and psychodynamics of the American majority (i.e., whites) as a "superculture" upon which all other groups were judged to have less value and status. Inherent in this construct was the idea that living within two cultures was psychologically uncomfortable for an individual and inevitably resulted in suffering. This construct was embedded in much of the educational research prior to 2000, especially in higher education. Learning, adjustment and development of students of color attending PWIs were predicated on the ability to integrate into the mainstream "superculture" and integration into its academic and social subsystems (Tinto, 1987). These subsystems typically were said to reflect the dominant white culture and successful navigation in them required students to abandon previous communities (Tierney, 1992). The prominent line of thinking in higher education literature prior to 2000 was that students of color were expected to overcome the inherent disadvantages of not being in the mainstream. The onus of responsibility was believed to fall on the student, who had to learn how to function appropriately at PWIs to persist. Thus, race and ethnicity were seen not as potential sources of multicultural functioning, but rather as educational disadvantages for students of color at PWIs.

Early thought on how to improve this socialization focused on creating college experiences of Latina/os and other students of color. Institutions were urged to "develop more culturally responsive ways to engage minority students" to create "multicultural entities" where cultural differences are "highlighted and celebrated" (Tierney, 1992, p. 604). Today, institutions provide programs and initiatives that promote ideas such as ethnic consciousness (Case & Hernandez, 2013), ethnic centrality (Rivas-Drake, 2011), and understanding of cultural values and behaviors (Chavez & Rudolph, 2007). Changing the perspective broke away from ideas that conformity was the norm to gain acceptance in college.

Bicultural Socialization

One early alternative explanation of an individual's ability to become socialized into two environments was the concept of bicultural socialization. de Anda's (1984) bicultural socialization model was one of the earliest approaches toward explaining how diverse individuals learn "distinct behavioral repertoires for utilization in the minority and majority societies" (p. 102). The repertoires presented by de Anda differed from previous explanations of biculturalism where two cultures were seen separate from each other. Rather, these cultures overlap, providing an area where there is an opportunity for shared "norms, values, beliefs, perceptions, and the like" (de Anda, 1984, p. 102).

Current thought on cultural socialization moves away from viewing race and ethnicity as a deficiency towards functioning in society and instead views cultural heritage and pride as conducive to the development of Latina/os in young adulthood, especially in college (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Rivas-Drake, 2011; Torres, 1999). Success in a majority culture was not dependent on the degree of assimilation, but rather by the degree by which a minority individual can become or is likely to become bicultural (de Anda, 1984; Rivas-Drake, 2011). The literature in bicultural adjustment has shifted to reflect more the influence racial and ethnic identity had in assisted individuals' successful navigation between cultures (Torres, 1999, 2003). Higher education has, for the most part, responded to these shifts by placing focus on how institutions provided environments that supported student identity development and socialization into PWIs.

Cultural socialization should be considered in discussions of student success at PWIs. The environment at such campuses tend to be viewed as one where students had to carefully navigate campus cultural values and beliefs alongside Latina/o identity development and pride. In addition, campus environments at PWIs could challenge this student development with experiences with discrimination, stereotypes, and racism. Adjustment to these environments required mediating experiences that enhanced "development of multiple types of ethnic beliefs and perceptions of opportunity among Latinos" (Rivas-Drake, 2011, p. 615).

These approaches were different in how they defined the role that individuals have in social interactions within two cultures. From this, researchers could break away from the idea that conformity is the norm for individuals to adjust and find acceptance within two cultures. By examining biculturalism constructs, educational leaders and researchers are provided opportunities to view the socialization processes for Latina/os attending PWIs. For students attending such institutions, socialization into PWIs was a complex process involving multiple players and actions. Campus components like campus cultural centers could be used to further assist students' socialization into a PWI (Chung, 2015).

Campus Cultural Centers

Spaces on campus for cultural expression and development have been viewed as influential elements in Latina/o student success (Lozano, 2010). Campus cultural centers were said to provide spaces where professional, cultural and social support for students of color could be found (Montelongo, 2003; Johnson, 1997; Patton, 2010). They provided a link to the student's own culture, provide psychological support, and allow a place where the student can relax in a familiar social setting (Cabera & Hurtado, 2015; Johnson, 1997; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). These centers also provided a space within the campus environment where interests of cultural groups can be expressed in direct, productive, and empowering ways (Howard-Hamilton, Hinton, & Hughes, 2010; Patton, 2010). Campus cultural centers also contributed to a more multicultural academic environment by exposing cultural heritage to all students educated in a Eurocentric perspective common in the United States (Montelongo, 2003; Johnson, 1997; Lozano, 2010; Reyes, 2015).

Campus cultural centers and ethnic-focused leadership programs at PWIs were found to provide participants opportunities to have interactions with peers, faculty, and staff who have successfully navigated the bicultural socialization experience (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Chung, 2015; Lozano, 2010). Interactions with these individuals provided students cultural translators who can give accounts of the college experience, providing members' information on how to adapt to the PWI. Latina/o cultural center participants also found opportunities to interact and to become involved with non-Latina/o administrators (e.g. student affairs administrators), faculty,

and student groups on campus (Montelongo et al., 2015). Latina/o students who utilized the programs and services of a Latina/o cultural center frequently interacted with these formal and informal mediators from the mainstream culture to represent and voice the concerns of members to the campus community (Montelongo et al., 2015; Perez, 2015). Campus cultural centers also fostered and produced Latina/o student leaders who became active participants in college student life (Montelongo, 2003; Case & Hernandez, 2013). These leaders in turn served as models for other Latina/o students. Students who developed their leadership skills by becoming involved in the programming of cultural centers, as well as extending this involvement outside the sphere of the cultural center into other campus student activities (e.g., student government, residence hall governance, student union, etc.), provided examples of behavior that were consistent with bicultural socialization between environments at PWIs and ethnic identity development (Chung, 2015).

Involvement at PWIs

Involvement is described as an active term implying a behavioral component observed by students. Astin's (1993) classic definition of involvement described it as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" where descriptions such as "participate in", "join in", and "partake of" were usually associated with this behavior (p.297). Viewing involvement as behavioral is critical in its definition and observation: "it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves" (Astin, 1993, p. 298). The quantity and quality of involvement was dependent upon what choices the individual is willing to make to supplement experiences in the college environment. A highly involved student in college was one who "devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (Astin, 1993, p. 297). Astin's definition of involvement highlighted the simple fact that benefits could be obtained by investing time and energy in areas such as extracurricular participation in college student organizations.

Maximizing the involvement opportunities for students in extracurricular activities could enhance educational excellence. Creative planning and programming allowed students to explore their college experience and connect their exploration with their long-term life plans. Astin (1993) advised that involvement was an idea that connoted something more than the psychological state of students. Student involvement was described as a construct that could be directly observed. From this observation, involvement could then lend itself to being measured. A variety of student development changes concerning cognitive and affective growth is associated with participation in college extracurricular activities (Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research in college student involvement has emphasized the importance of supplementing academic learning with learning that occurs outside the formal classroom environment.

Latina/o Student Organizations

Within higher education literature, the number of studies published on Latina/o student involvement in college student organizations increased since the turn of the new century. For example, colleges saw an upsurge of Latina/o fraternities and sororities since the 1980s into the 2000's, joining the long-standing Black groups as alternatives to the traditional Greek system (Heidenreich, 2006). Today, numerous Latina/o and multicultural Greek-lettered organizations

exist in American higher education and as their presence on campus continues to rise, research investigating their impact on issues ranging from retention to student development can be found to understand the involvement effects of these Latina/o student organizations (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Fajardo, 2015). As knowledge of the growing involvement of Latina/o college students was shared, the United States relied on its colleges and universities to prepare students for leadership positions in business, the professions, education, and government. A helpful understanding of Latina/o student leadership through these organizations and others can be obtained by examining the cultural elements that shape Latina/o involvement and orientation towards campus extracurricular activities.

In an article focused on characteristics of this growing area of Latina/o student leadership, Davis (1997) asserted that "leadership development is necessary for the advancement of the Latino communities" (p. 227), a growing need given increasing Latina/o enrollments at that time. However, scholarly research prior to 2000 for the most part ignored the role or impact of involvement in student organizations concerning students of color in higher education, especially for Latinas/os (Montelongo, 2003). Since then, improvement has been made on producing research investigating the experiences and outcomes of Latina/o student organization involvement.

Most students who became participants in Latina/o student organizations entered college with established affiliations to communities outside their universities (Cabrera & Hurtado, 2015; Perez, 2015; Trevino, 1992). These affiliations were characterized by community service, political activism, and advocacy for a variety of social concerns (Montelongo et al., 2015; Davis, 1997; Heidenreich, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Reyes, 2015). Many Latinas/os used Latina/o student organizations to maintain their already competent leadership skills. For Latina/o college students, participation in organizations provided social-community activities that were important in instilling a feeling of connection to the university environment and creating a home away from home (Delgado-Romero, Hernandez, & Montero, 2004; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Involvement in culturally-related college activities such as these found in Latina/o college student organizations provided and maintained links to communities familiar to Latina/o students (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Davis, 1997; Cabrera & Hurtado, 2015). Continued contact with external communities through service activities and volunteer efforts were important features Latina/o college student organizations offered to participants (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015; Montelongo, 2003). These connections are important characteristics in the extracurricular involvement patterns of Latina/o college students. While understanding the benefits of student involvement has helped in promoting the Latina/o student success, there still needs to be concern regarding Latina/o representation among faculty and administration at PWIs (Allen, 2016). The impact of peer groups and family also play a part in the advancement of Latinas/os attending these campuses.

Advancement at PWIs

In 1991, Sagaria and Johnsrud stated, "no need is more urgent today than the full participation and achievement of minorities in education" (p.105). Almost thirty years later, educational leadership still is working to improve the educational status of Latinas/os at all levels and areas. Latinas/os in higher education prior to 2000 were described as continually facing organizational challenges where advancement opportunities were unseen and barriers were persevering (Valverde, 1988). The "adobe ceiling" was described by Burciaga (as cited in Rodriguez, 1994) as being similar, yet different, than the glass ceiling in that "you can't see

through it (adobe) and it's made to last for centuries" (p. 23). Currently, examples of this "adobe ceiling" can be found in the descriptions of Latina/o experiences in doctoral programs and in executive educational leadership positions.

The doctorate degree was described as a route towards advancement of Latina/os in higher education faculty and administration positions. However, the doctoral experience for persons of color was typically characterized by courses using dominant perspectives and ethnocentric studies. Additionally, gender gaps exist for Latinas/os in their attainment of doctorate degrees and administrative leadership positions (Rodriguez, 1994; Saenz, Ponjuan, & Lopez Figueroa, 2016). Latina/o executives in higher education were also described as scarce in college and university leadership, which was problematic since this resulted in Latina/o students having few role models on campus (Saenz et al., 2015). An unfortunate outcome of this lack of representation within these levels is the failure of higher-level administrators recognizing the urgency to improve student success for Latina/o populations (Saenz et al., 2015; Valverde, 1988).

The proportions of Latinas/os at PWIs in all levels have not changed considerably to reflect the dramatic demographic changes occurring in the United States. The result is a difficult climate facing many Latinas/os entering PWIs. Definitions of success, the impact of peer groups and mentors, and the influence of family have been factors discussed in the advancement of Latina/o students, faculty, and administration. Understanding the experiences of Latina/o college students as well as faculty and staff are no longer matters of concern for just diverse populations.

Faculty

Studies on college student retention found those who persist reported higher levels of interaction with faculty and staff (Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Latina/o students who perceived a student-centered faculty and had opportunities for interaction with faculty were more likely to persist (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Zambrana & Hurtado, 2015). Brown and Robinson Kurpius (1997) and Nuñez, Ramalho, & Cuero (2010) suggested further that the greatest impact occurred in the student to faculty relationship when both individuals were from the same ethnic group. Identifying Latina/o faculty or staff on a predominantly white campus was not always easy. Generally, low percentages of Latina/o faculty and staff members were employed at PWIs. Subsequently, prior to 2000 and even more so today, Latina/o professionals on these campuses were overextended with responsibilities and often unavailable to serve as role models, (Alvarado & Hurtado, 2015; Hawkins, 1988; Machado-Casas, Ruiz, & Cantu, 2013; Stewart, 2012). Prior to 2000, Arnold (1993) found for talented students of color at PWIs, faculty mentorship was very difficult to identify. Today, the same statement was still apparent for Latina/os attending PWIs (Lopez Figueroa, 2016).

Despite the low rates of Latina/o and other ethnic minority faculty, faculty in general still played a critical role in academic persistence. The role of faculty in promoting persistence through student interactions was a key component in the concept of validation developed by Rendon (1994), which has since been used to recognize the importance of faculty interaction (Linares, & Munoz, 2011). Specific examples of validating techniques according to Rendon's original model included:

- 1) faculty who demonstrated a genuine concern for teaching students;
- 2) faculty who were personable and approachable toward students;
- 3) faculty who treated students equally;
- 4) faculty who structured learning experiences that allowed students to experience themselves as capable of learning;
- 5) faculty who worked

individually with those students needing extra help; and 6) faculty who provide meaningful feedback to students (1994, p. 48-49).

Furthermore, Rendon (1994) found that validation was best facilitated when a faculty member or administrator made the initial contact. To this matter, Rendon recommended:

- 1) orientation training for faculty and staff to the needs and strengths of culturally diverse student populations;
- 2) training faculty/administrators to validate students;
- 2) fostering a validating classroom community; and
- 3) fostering a learning community outside the classroom within the context of student affairs (p. 48-49).

Since its inception, the model has been revalidated and is still widely used as a strategy to promote college student success, especially for diverse student populations (Linares & Munoz, 2011).

Peer Groups

Regarding the impact students have on one another, Padilla et al. (1997) provided an early study on strategies successful Latina/o students employed to overcome a host of barriers toward academic success in college. These researchers used an expertise model of successful college students to develop a local model of student success. In order to navigate a variety of barriers at the college, successful students employed heuristic knowledge, described as informal knowledge passed down from students to students: “This knowledge was locally defined at the institution and often acquired experientially” (Padilla et al., 1997, p. 126). Equally, Attinasi’s (1989) seminal study on first year persistence for Latina/os found that these students often learned successful strategies such as “getting to know” the institution through the process of “peer knowledge sharing.”

Since then, researchers found that success during the critical first year of college appeared contingent upon whether students could get involved in institutional life or find validation whether through an academic or interpersonal experience (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). Academic and interpersonal validation required a process that affirms, supports, enables, and reinforces the capacity to fully develop as a student and as an individual. With respect to academic validation, forming peer study groups outside of the classroom was a successful tool (Rendon, 1994; Linares & Munoz, 2011).

Since the 1990’s, the concept of student learning communities has begun to take the center stage in promoting learning and persistence. Learning communities were described as a kind of co-registration or block scheduling that allowed students to take courses together. Students typically enrolled in a set of predetermined courses that were linked together by a common theme. Learning communities typically established support peer groups, increased student commitment to classroom learning and resulted in increased persistence (Baker, 2008; Tinto, 1998). Hurtado and Carter (1997) provided early knowledge that Latina/o “students who frequently discussed course work with other students outside of class had a higher sense of belonging in the third year of college” (p. 338). Since then, the importance of organized peer group interactions still appeared to increase students’ sense of group cohesion and in turn enhanced ethnic identity development, individual connection with the college, and higher education in general (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

Family

Latina/o culture in the literature was distinctly marked by characteristics that were markedly singular from white mainstream culture. One key central cultural tenet for Latinas/os that differed from white Americans was the emphasis on family and in-group membership. Latina/o culture emphasized the role of the family. Especially in leadership, focus tended to be on the group rather than the individual (Bordas, 2012). Within the Latina/o family unit, unity was stated to be very important, where inclusiveness and generosity for others originated from respect for and loyalty to the family (Bordas, 2012; National Council of La Raza, 2013; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014; Sue & Sue, 1999). According to an earlier study by Garcia-Preto (1996) *personalismo*, a form of individualism “that values those inner qualities in people that make them unique and give them a sense of self-worth, is another value most Latinos[as] seem to hold. In contrast, [white] American individualism values achievement” (p. 151). The competing roles of *personalismo* and individualism apparent among Latina/o and white students created difficulty for students to navigate how to apply values where a sense of *la familia* was valued and sustained.

Gandara (1995) in her pivotal study of high-achieving Chicana/o college students found the role of family stories was a positive force for achievement among Latinas/os. Parents told stories of wealth or prestige, and position to their children and provided family histories about achievement amid poverty. Some psychologists have suggested that cultural myths and fairy tales can affect the achievement orientations of individuals (Simonton as cited in Gandara, 1995). Parents created a culture of possibility through story telling, their personal faith in the future and the identification of familial heroes and heroines. These stories reinforced the cultural value of *personalismo*, where students heard and learned lessons of self-worth exemplified by members of their own families.

For White students who attend PWIs, there is a likelihood that others in their family have previously attended college who could possibly help in the transition to college life. In addition, more resources tend to be available for these students in their preparation for college academics (Zambrana & Hurtado, 2015). As a result, many majority students entered college with a set of known expectations and support systems (i.e., family) that were familiar with the campus community. These students were often better equipped to handle the challenges of college life.

Based on the knowledge of the importance of family in socialization and success at a PWI, it was incumbent upon educational leaders to reach out to the families of Latina/os. First-generation college students in particular needed an orientation for parents. Over twenty years ago, Terenzini et al. (1994) proclaimed “parents/spouses of all students, but particularly those of first-generation students, must be helped to understand the nature of the academic and time demands that will be placed on the students, what will be happening to students (and to the parents/spouses as well!), and how to deal with the stresses parents/spouses and students will be experiencing” (p. 71). Eimers and Pike (1997) found that encouragement from family and friends had an important influence on students of color intentions to persist in college. Today, the evidence strongly indicates that families play a key role in the support of new students adjusting to community and four-year college environments. For example, Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith (2014) highlighted the critical role of families in providing social capital for student success at a community college. Although the campus in their study was described as a “majority-minority serving” campus, Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith (2014) explained financial and moral support offered by the family were key to the eventual success of students. Their finding on the importance of family providing social capital could easily be applied to

other institutional types. Reflective of the growing literature that emphasized the contributions of Latina/o families on student success, colleges continued to develop and grow programs to guide Latina/o parents through the first few years of the student's transition into college.

Implications for Educational Leadership Programs and Practitioners

The unique cultural aspects shaping Latina/o socialization, involvement, and advancement at predominantly white institutions impact the college success of this group at all levels. As the faces of today's college student reflect the changes within United States society, conventional and more traditional models of leadership and research in higher education need to be conducted by a transformational view that considers the experiences of diverse student populations. An early example of this transformational view in higher education is provided by Stage and Anaya (1996), who stated that educators should view "all student's experiences...as a source and subject of pertinent facts, priorities, and research problems...[where] the researcher is neither objective nor distanced from those who are the focus of the research" (p.50). While their perspective is centered on educational research, Stage and Anaya's (1996) suggestion is valuable advice for educational leadership decision-making and program development at all levels.

Transformational approaches provide educational leaders, researchers, and practitioners unique perspectives into the college experience of Latina/os at PWIs. As evidence in this overview of comprehending cultural factors impacting Latina/o student success at PWIs, studies written by Latina/o researchers have investigated Latina/o socialization using bicultural frameworks that advocate functioning within two distinct environments, rather than assimilation into the dominant majority culture apparent at PWIs. Involvement in Latina/o cultural centers and Latina/o college student organizations are stated to be influential and important components in the Latina/o college experience. Lastly, peer groups and family were found to be critical in the advancement in education for Latinas/os. Based on these studies, a set of best practices for facilitating Latina/o student success can be developed.

Educational leaders and college campuses should gain more knowledge on the socialization processes apparent for Latina/os attending PWIs and respond to these processes by establishing visible areas of cultural support and expression. Campus cultural centers were found to be a highly effective means to support Latina/o college students looking to engage and interact with others who have successfully navigated two cultures – the college culture and Latina/o culture. Such spaces can be found on college campuses, but they can also be provided at the K-12 schools in the form of student groups, events, and offices. From these visible spaces, Latina/o student organizations can be housed and advised to encourage full participation in campus student life, within and beyond the cultural center or office. Educational leaders also need to understand the importance of recruiting and retaining Latina/o faculty and staff at their schools and campuses. Programs and initiatives to mentor and promote these individuals allow students to find role models to interact with or order to emulate behaviors that lead to current and future success at a PWI. Last and most important, families play a crucial part of the overall student success of Latina/os attending college. Success at PWIs does not have to adhere to ideas that separation from previous communities needs to occur for successful transition into PWIs. Rather, success can be found when students' families are part of these transitions. Educational leaders should be mindful on how to support family connections starting with orientation through graduation.

The rise of success initiatives like those described by Saenz, Ponjuan, & Lopez Figueroa (2016) provide a template to understand the needs of Latina/o students at PWIs. From these best

practices, the all too familiar perspective of Latina/o failure in education can be altered to allow educational leaders, researchers, and practitioners to focus more on success strategies in college participation, leadership, and socialization at PWIs.

Conclusion

For decades, educational leaders, researchers, and practitioners have asked the question “What contributes to a student’s failure to succeed in college?” By focusing on failure, a variety of negative terms have been used to characterize students who decide to leave college (e.g. dropouts, pushouts, stopouts) and institutional processes used to describe these actions (e.g., attrition, withdrawal, institutional departure). As a result, the lexicon of Latina/o student socialization and experiences at PWIs has been defined by terms closely rooted in a pathology of failure. However, current research has begun to focus on student success. Using a success-oriented lens helps describe variables and experiences that have helped students beat the odds, increase the chances of persistence, and ultimately graduate from college. By identifying the factors that have aided in student success, educational leaders and practitioners can take a proactive approach to ensure social and academic transition and create effective programming efforts for students of color who decide to attend a predominantly White college or university to operate on an optimum level.

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