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Many college and university students, particularly Latinos/as, interact with higher education via racial and ethnic lenses magnified by self-concept, the educational institutions they attend, and other internal and external factors. While unraveling such lenses, the author assesses Latino/a racial and ethnic identity development and its inextricable relation to the health of the academy.

I know who I am, and who I may be if I choose.
Don Quixote (Cervantes, 1964)

Racial and ethnic identity have been distinctly linked to self-concept and perception in relation to group membership. While student affairs research has been conducted regarding the racial and ethnic identity development of certain racial and ethnic groupings such as the identity development models of Chickering and Reisser (1993); Helms (1990); and Cross, Parham, and Helms (1991), limited research on Latino/a student racial and ethnic identity development has surfaced.

Compared to the number of other existing identity development models, there are very few studies available for administrators, educators, or practitioners attempting to acquaint themselves with the experience of the Latino/a college student. Such understanding has precedence: lack of understanding "can lead to inappropriate and ineffective responses to volatile racial situations on campus" (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, p. 21). For higher education institutions to effectively meet the needs of the Latino/a population, it is necessary first to understand "students' background and the critical role it plays in shaping their educational decisions, actions, and resilience" (Eaton, 2004, p. 3).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reported that the Hispanic population makes up approximately 12% of the total population in the United States of America (p. 6). In spite of this, Latinos/as are dismally represented in U.S. institutions of higher education. As a result, Latinos/as, depending upon their institution of choice, may experience college in unique ways. Specifically, how they come to formulate their racial and ethnic identities can be influenced by a number of internal (e.g., family, religion, etc.) and external factors. Unlike mainstream identity development models customarily prominent among student affairs and higher education practitioners, Latino/a racial and ethnic identity development has long been a peripheral topic. In fact, methods for how to study such development are indistinct. Because institutional and national data are rarely disaggregated by race and ethnicity, we know little about how the educational needs, achievements, or problems of Latino/a students differ from students of other ethnicities and their White counterparts.

Author as Advocate
As a first-year Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration student at The University of Vermont, I became increasingly aware of the theories student affairs practitioners use to serve students attending colleges and universities today. This realization became more pronounced in a class entitled College Students in America where I was introduced to several identity development theories, including the Black identity development model of Cross et al. (1991), Helms' (1990) White identity development model, and models of sexual identity development. However, little evidence exists documenting Latino/a identity development. It appears that student affairs is in an unfortunate predicament that could, in light of the growing population of Latino/a people in the United States of America (U.S.A.), someday backfire leaving the profession ill-prepared.

Concurrent with College Students in America, I took a course entitled Cultural Pluralism in the Academy where I studied the concept of social justice and its importance to the field of student affairs. While in class, I voiced my concern regarding the need for Latino/a student advocates and research. I also mentioned my apprehension to pursue such work because my racial and ethnic background is dissimilar to that of Latinos/as. My professor replied, "It is not required that one share an identity to advocate for it" (B. T. Kelly, personal communication, 2004). The professor's words clung to my moral imagination, calling me to hope and work for a better-equipped student affairs profession.

In this article, I consider myself both an author as well as an advocate. In May 2004, I communicated with Latino/a students from a predominately White university, The University of Vermont, and a university that is 54% Latino/a, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, in order to gain an understanding of Latino/a student racial and ethnic identity

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development at each type of educational institution. Through an examination of these comments, this article will discuss the racial and ethnic identity development of Latino/a students and the implications for the field of student affairs.

Terminology

Race
Dr. Silvia Spangler of the Human Genome Project stated, "Race is neither biological nor scientific" (Santiago-Rivera, 2004, p. 2). Scientific thinkers, such as Silvia Spangler, would sustain the notion that "race is something we do to one another" (Santiago-Rivera, p. 2). Another researcher stated:

Identity itself is a myth-a myth of origin, or destiny, or both. We 'make up people' inventing categories, giving each category not only a label but an imagined history and an imagined behavioral script-and then deciding, Yes or No, whether particular individuals should be assigned to the category. (Johnson, 1998, p. 158)

Much of the literature read for this study suggests that race is defined as a classification of sociological humanity; I choose to utilize the notion I understood to be the most comprehensible: race is a sociological classification of humanity.

Ethnicity
Similar to race, the term ethnicity has proven to be just as elusive. Studied from the perspective of disciplines such as sociology, educational anthropology, and psychology, several scholars have struggled to conceptualize the term. "Ethnicity is narrowly defined by distinguishing differences of national and cultural characteristics: These differences are multidimensional and include language, food, behavior, and other customs" (Torres, 2003, p. 532). Also, ethnicity was described as a group of individuals "who share a unique social and cultural heritage (e.g., language, custom, religion) passed on between generations" (Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993, p. 6). Separate from the concept of race, ethnicity draws on more specific particulars that distinguish a people such as foods and customs.

What do I mean by Latino/a?
The label "Hispanic was created in 1978 by Directive 15 of the Office of Budget and Management [and] defined as a 'person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture of origin'" (Santiago-Rivera, 2004, p. 6). This rubric includes people who descend from inhabitants of countries in Central and South America as well as the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Most of this population is composed of people of Mexican descent. Puerto Ricans and Cubans are the next largest groups, followed by people from Central and South America and the Dominican Republic. Of these populations, about 21% of Central Americans and 67% of Mexicans were born in the U.S.A., indicating a continuing influx of these populations to the U.S.A. (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. viii). Clearly, when researchers spoke about Hispanics or Latinos/as, they referred to a diverse population of individuals and groups.

The term Hispanic connotes stereotypical assumptions that each person who speaks Spanish also shares Spanish ancestry and language. "Though many Latino/as speak Spanish, this does not determine their ethnicity" (Johnson, 1998, p. 163). This notion not only forces false understanding, but also impels persons of no common ancestry to form a fake identity alliance:

Huge differences in language differentiate the Latino/a community. While many speak Spanish, some do not. Spanish is still classified by Anglo society as a foreign language, even though it has long been part of Southwestern culture and was spoken in some regions long before they became part of the English-speaking United States. (Johnson, 1998, p. 163)

Although language and ethnicity are often related, many times they are not. Unfortunately, it appears that language and ethnicity has largely remained synonymous, serving to reinforce the aforementioned false identity alliance.

Physical appearance also presents complication. Light or dark skinned Latinos/as can transition from a self-identification of race to a socially constructed identification of race (Johnson, 1998) when confronted with shade-related societal expectations. In his book *How Did You Get to be Mexican*, Johnson (1998) argued, "Until racial … background becomes as 'transparent' as whiteness, it seems that full assimilation will be impossible" (p. 156). Although full assimilation into Whiteness is not possible, it appears that those Latinos/as who are lighter enjoy privilege that is not possible for darker

skinned Latinos/as: "Fairer Latinos have different experiences and face different choices, just as Latinos with Anglo surnames generally have more choice than people with Spanish surnames" (Johnson, p. 161).

"Latinos come in all forms … light, dark, Spanish-speaking, English-fluent, bilingual, immigrants (legal and undocumented), refugees, citizens" (Johnson, 1998, p. 178). Latino/a racial and ethnic identity, like many other identities, is conglomerated. Nonetheless, I believe the term to be less restrictive than the term Hispanic. It is with hesitancy that I use the term Latino/a for the term Hispanic can be seen as a blanket term masking the uniqueness of many ethnicities, while still "boxing."

Latino/a Identity Development

Given that Latinos/as continue to lag behind other ethnic minorities and Anglos on most measures of success, including educational attainment and economic well-being (Secada et al., 1998), it is increasingly important for student affairs administrators, faculty, and the larger campus community to understand the complexity of the Latino/a students' racial and ethnic identity formation processes. Eaton, a researcher of Latino/a affairs at the University of Maryland-College Park, articulated:

Once educational experts recognize and begin understanding the unique differences within the Latino/a community, it is possible to begin critically examining present theories of student development that are used by practitioners to understand students and facilitate their learning. Specifically, student development theories that explain psychosocial, cognitive, and other social identity issues need to be critically examined through an independent, historical, and social lens in their application to Latino/a students. (Eaton, 2004, p. 3)

Although Eaton's research recognized the lack of student development theory in relation to Latino/a students, it does not critique the field or its practitioners. The research used the concept of *possible selves* first introduced in 1986 by Markus and Nurius, one that views the subject of identity through independent, historical, and social lenses.

Possible Selves
Ginorio and Huston (2001), authors of *Sí, Se Puede! Yes, We Can: Latinas in School*, used the theory of possible selves to articulate the interaction between Latinas' current social contexts and their perceived options for the present and the future. The concept "pertains to how individuals think about their potential and their future. These possible selves are individualized or personalized, but they are also distinctly social" (Ginorio & Huston, p. x).

The concept of possible selves explicitly draws on contextual factors. It acknowledges the influence of "individuals' particular sociocultural and historical context and … the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and … immediate social experiences" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. x). The concept assumes that in social interactions with others (families, peers, school personnel, media, etc.) individuals cultivate beliefs about "the pool of possible selves" from which they imagine and claim their place in the world.

How one sees the world through race and ethnicity directly affects one's definition of a possible self. How the world interacts with Latinos/as and how Latinos/as interact with the world, shapes their private and public personae, first internally (intrapersonally) then externally (interpersonally) via various aspects of Latino/a race or ethnicity. Few researchers have been able to detach pieces of the Latino/a racial and ethnic experience.

Intrapersonal Selves
Torres (2003), a major researcher of Latino/a issues in higher education, offered an identity development schema (pp. 533-534) to understand some of the complex dimensions of Latino/a student racial and ethnic identity. A question posed in her research provides some impetus for this composition: "If a student does not leave a geographic area where Latinos are a critical mass, would his or her development differ from students who [do] relocate [to an area where Latinos/as are a critical mass]" (p. 546)? On the other hand, I ask; If a student does not leave a geographic area where Latinos/as are *not* a critical mass, would his or her development differ from students who relocate to predominately Latino/a environments?

In spite of the many social and political challenges facing Latino/a students, it is important that Latino/a students gain clarity regarding their own identity from racial and ethnic perspectives. Torres' (2003) Latino/a student racial identity development model allows students to gain that clarity via the following orientations:

(a) bicultural orientation--comfort level with both cultures,
(b) Latino/Hispanic orientation--greater comfort with culture of origin,
(c) Anglo orientation--greater comfort with majority culture,
(d) marginal orientation--discomfort with both cultures that may indicate internal conflict, and
(e) acculturation--choices made about the majority culture versus ethnic identity maintenance of culture of origin. (pp. 533-534)

Some students from The University of Vermont, a predominately White institution, identified with Torres' (2003) Latino/Hispanic orientation. One anonymous student I communicated with stated, "Just being around so many White people makes me think I need to be more Hispanic than I normally am" (personal communication, July 15, 2004). I interpreted this to mean that this person is uncomfortable with both cultures, which may indicate internal conflict (otherwise termed marginal orientation). However, the same student went on to explain, "By this I mean, I have to represent my culture and defend it against stereotypes more often. This has made my identity as a Hispanic stronger" (personal communication). Clearly this student finds comfort in their culture of origin.

Latinos/as at predominately Latino/a institutions, such as the Texas A&M University–Kingsville, also identify with the Latino/Hispanic orientation of Torres (2003). As one student said, "I can say I am comfortable at this institution. I know many people that have somewhat the same background as I do and I can identify with them as well as they do with me" (personal communication, July 15, 2004). This quote reflects the sentiments of each person I consulted regarding their racial and ethnic experience at Texas A&M University–Kingsville. Another anonymous person said, "I am real satisfied with how I experience my racial/ethnic identity at this school … because we are [the] majority at this school" (personal communication, July 15, 2004). The word "we" in this quote denotes a very strong feeling of Latino/a citizenry at this institution. The use of we causes one to suspect that these students at the predominately Latino/a institution have a concept of improved possible selves that allows them to envision furthering their education. As stated above, possible selves are "individualized or personalized, but they are also distinctly social" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. x), hence the term we.

I recently asked students from a predominately Latino/a institution: How do you think your identity development would be different had you attended a predominately White institution? One student said, "I believe . . . my Latino identity would be criticized . . . and I wouldn't be able to live peacefully" (personal communication, July 15, 2004). Another student stated, "it would definitely be a bigger challenge but I would have to adapt" (personal communication, July 14, 2004). These students identified with Torres' (2003) acculturation orientation where they make choices between maintaining their ethnic identity from their culture of origin and choosing the majority culture. It is important to note that these students believe a predominantly White environment would not be conducive to their identity.

Interpersonal Selves
Recent research indicated that Latino/a students at the doctoral level experience conflict between two different worlds: their home culture and their new environment in the academy (Diaz, 2004; Gonzalez et al., 2001). As evidenced in the previous section, for Latino/a undergraduate students such tension can be prevalent throughout their higher education experience. In fact, the chances of a Latino/a student encountering a Latino/a faculty member are tragically low. For example, "in 1995, Hispanics overall comprised 12,942 of the full-time faculty members in the United States colleges and universities – just 2%. . . . Latinas comprise 5,078 of the full-time faculty (1%), and Latinos, 7,864" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 12). Nationwide, 558 Latinas and 1,912 Latinos were full professors (Ginorio & Huston). Latino/a students' possible selves are impacted by interpersonal interactions within higher education.

Implications for Student Affairs

It is imperative that the profession of student affairs develops a healthy, informed, practice-based position in working with Latino/a students that is congruent with the philosophy of student affairs. The fundamental ethos of student affairs is to "facilitate development in students, not to stifle it or hide from it" (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, p. 34). Lack of awareness of the needs of this ever-growing population of students is in direct conflict to the basic ethos of the

profession. In practice, institutions are inviting Latino/a students to monetarily sustain educational institutions while minimally investing in their development as they enter and matriculate.

Development within the student affairs profession includes the challenges of developing ethically, seeking and understanding different ideas and viewpoints, striving to keep one another safe from physical and emotional harm, and celebrating human differences. Each of these student affairs mantras point to the fact that if we are to be ethical; if we are to strive towards the safekeeping of our Latino/a students, faculty, and staff; if we are to celebrate the diversity Latinos/as contribute, then this topic should be one of paramount importance throughout colleges and universities across the country. Unfortunately:

The beliefs that underlie the theory and practice of American education are deeply ingrained in our culture. They affect our expectations for students . . . our judgments about the contributions of education to the national welfare. In addition, they shape our views on how people should be treated, and who should make the decisions about education. When a system of beliefs functions to shape people's behaviors, to give them direction . . . we call that system an ideology. (Stevens & Wood, 1994, p. *xiii*)

The survival of Latinos/as in higher education is inextricably related to the health of this nation's educational institutions. If that survival is compromised, the success of these campuses will be poor at best. As the Latino/a population increases, a renewed commitment to Latino/a concerns will be continually salient in the coming years. The Latino/a student population, as reflected in national growth rates, will be larger in numbers than ever before; Latinos/as will be demanding the understanding, resources, and support of higher education and student affairs. Therefore, it is important for practitioners to span student affairs, higher education, and if need be, other disciplines to prepare by rolling up our collective sleeves across educational institutions towards a better understanding of Latino/a racial and ethnic identity development.

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