Hearing the silence: Acknowledging the voice of my Latina sisters

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ABSTRACT

Latina community college students experience a number of challenges during their transition to college. Findings from a larger study indicated that Latina community college students experienced racism and stereotyping on campus responding with silence. Silence occurred in two ways: (1) Latinas were forced to be silent, and/or (2) Latinas chose to be silent. This article presents the Latina Silence to Resilience Pathway Model illustrating the four phases experienced by Latina community college students beginning with the experience of racism on campus ultimately resulting in personal outcomes. Along the continuum of the model Latinas also often experience an identity transition.

Keywords: transition, identity, silence, resilience

INTRODUCTION

The transition from high school to college is often a challenging process. Most first-year community college students tend to experience confusion, concerns pertaining to financial support, apprehension related to peer acceptance and belonging, difficulty balancing school with all other aspects of life, and sometimes lack of familial and friend support (Nuñez, 2009; Weissman, Bulakowski & Jumisko, 1998). Latina students often encounter isolation, discrimination, racism, and exposure to negative stereotyping ultimately leading to feelings of social exclusion resulting in a delay of or non-existent social adjustment (Nuñez, 2009; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993). As a result of these campus experiences Latinas often resort to self-silencing. Further, these forms of exclusion, lack of campus involvement and socialization, adjustment issues, and the absence of various forms of campus support frequently lead to stopping and or dropping out of college during their first year enrolled (Bradburn, 2002). More importantly these students who leave college during their first year are also less likely to return to college or attain academic achievement thereafter (Carter & Wilson, 1993; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1987 & 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

As of 2011, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) noted that nationally 25 percent of Latina/os between the ages of 16-24 were either not enrolled in school or not working. As of 2010, 15 percent of 16-24 year-old Latina/os were not enrolled in school and had not earned a high school credential, more commonly referred to as the status dropout rate (NCES, 2010). This represented the highest status dropout rate of any group in comparison to whites (5.1 percent), African Americans (8.0 percent), Asian/Pacific Islanders (4.2 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Natives (12.4 percent) (NCES). For those Latinas who do graduate from high school and enroll in college, there exist four main factors related to their college attrition: the first relates to all academic elements of college going, second are financial factors, third are personal, and fourth are institutional (Zurita, 2004-05, p. 302). The fourth factor includes institution-related issues such as transition, integration, adjustment, faculty involvement, and socialization (Zurita, 2004-05). Hurtado and Carter (1997) noted that the fourth factor is most connected to the transition of Latina/o students to college, rather than background characteristics. This article is based on a larger qualitative study that was conducted to better understand the experiences of Latina community college students who were transitioning or transitioned to community college. The aim of this paper is to highlight and further discuss the finding that there exists an issue of silencing among Latina community college students.

The overall idea connecting the research study participants together was their perceived transition experiences and how those experiences influenced transitioning. The research questions guiding this study were focused on two groups: (1) Latina students, and (2) Community College Administrator/Staff members. Utilizing a multiple case study design the research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What characterizes the Latina community college student transition experience at an urban/suburban community college?
2. How is the Latina student transition experience perceived and defined by Latina students attending an urban/suburban community college?
3. What is the nature of the transition involvement strategies used by Latina students who are currently attending an urban/suburban community college?

This article begins with a review of the relevant literature on silencing. The article discusses Interculturalism (2002) in connection to the issue of silencing Latina community college students. Next is an overview of the methodology, and site and participants. There were a number of findings that were determined as a result of the data analysis; however, for the purpose of this article the primary focus is on the silencing of Latina students occurring in the community college environment and the presentation of the Latina Silence to Resilience Pathway Model. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion and the implications for practice and designs for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite strides in learning about student persistence and Latina/o college student experiences, research on Latina/o community college student transitions is limited. There is much to learn and understand about Latina community college transition experiences and how these experiences fit into the larger picture of Latina higher education. According to Nuñez (2009) "little research has been conducted during this affirmative action era on the effects of diversity experiences and campus climate on Latina/o students' transitions to college" (p. 23). Further, gaining a clearer understanding of Latina student experiences and the facets thereof is critical. One of those facets would be silencing.

Silencing

Silencing is a subjective experience that Latina students endure as they transition to community college. A subjective experience silencing can occur in a number of ways including, according to the findings of this study, self-silencing and being silenced. According to Mazzei (2008) "racially inhibited silence" is often more prevalent in white-dominated settings where the silencing of whites occurs as a result of those who identify as white feeling challenged to discuss thoughts and feelings relating to diversity and the issues thereof (p. 1127). The context of silencing in this article refers to a shutdown of the Latina voice. However, it is critical to point out that Mazzei's (2008) conceptualization of silencing is parallel to the silencing of Latinas as determined from this study, as Mazzei (2008) noted that silencing can and often does lead to a limited if not absent conversation in the educational environment with a focus on race and diversity. Further, with the understanding that education should be an environment in which open discussion concerning race ought to occur instead it becomes a place where "education as a means of transformation or change is subverted, and silence as a means of control and protection is accepted" (p. 1129). Thus, silence becomes a mechanism by which racism and stereotypes fester by default.

Mazzei (2011) stated that silence works as a defense mechanism for white teachers and students leading to a protection of whiteness and all elements connected to whiteness such as power and privilege, but ultimately the silence in and of itself derives from fear. In addition to silence deriving from fear as a contrivance that hinders discussion within the educational setting, Mazzei (2011) introduced the concept that silence is often desired. In studying the nature of silence, Mazzei (2011) determined that "desired silence" in the pedagogical learning environment was the result of white teachers having a desire to "voice whiteness in ways that function to maintain privilege (i.e. power), identity and that resist the potential for loss" of that power (p. 658). Therefore, the desired silence functions as way for white teachers to preserve and

"to perpetuate a continuation of my/white/self as unchanged, unchallenged and in control" (Mazzei, 2011, p. 658). This level of silence supports the absence and continued nonexistent conversation with focus on diversity and culture in education.

While desired silence aims to protect the power of whiteness and serves to hinder and even prevent a discussion of diversity, the silence experienced by Latinas in higher education has not been explored. Yet is critical to begin to determine how the silencing of Latinas is connected to the existing conceptualization of silence drawn from the existing research. Further, silence needs to be a concept that is explored from the perspective of people of color who are often feeling a sense of silencing being imposed upon them and/or feel as if self-imposed silence is the only way to survive higher education.

Latinos in Education

The representation of Latina/o students in higher education is the highest at community colleges where Latina/o college students are more likely to begin their higher education learning (Nuñez, 2009; Nuñez, Sparks & Hernandez, 2011). For numerous reasons community colleges most often serve as the primary higher education entry point for Latina/o students (Nuñez, et al., 2011). For this reason alone it is critical that we begin to more clearly understand the experiences of Latinas as they transition to community college. In fact, the transitions of Latina/o students from high school to college "is a complex and challenging process" (Weissman et al., 1998, p. 19). There are salient differences in the transitioning process among white, African American and Latina/o students, which have implications when developing strategies that will have a positive impact on student achievement and success (Weissman et al., 1998).

Latina/os have consistently fallen behind that of white and African American students in relation to both bachelor's and master's degree attainment (NCES, 2009). Over the past several decades Latina/os have fallen behind African American students by as much as 9.2 percent (year 2006) in bachelor's degree attainment, which illustrates the largest baccalaureate gap between African Americans and Latina/os between the years 2006-11 (NCES, 2011). As of 2011, according to the NCES (2011) the total national percentage of Latina/os who earned a bachelor's degree between the ages of 25-29 years of age was 12.8 percent, which is the lowest percentage in comparison to that of white students at 39.2 percent, African American students at 20.1 percent, Asian Pacific Islander at 56.0 percent, and Native Indian/Alaska Native were at 17.3 percent. During the same year, with regard to master's degree attainment or higher degree attainment Latina/os represented a national total of 2.7 percent, with white students representing 8.1 percent, African American students were at 4.0 percent, and Asian Pacific Islander were at 16.7 percent. Between the years 2005-11, with exception of 2007 when the percent rounded to zero, the reporting standards for American Indian/Alaska Native were not met due to too few cases or the coefficient of variation was 50 percent or greater (NCES, 2011). Between the years 2005-11, 25-29 year-old Latina/os continually had the lowest master's degree or higher degree attainment in comparison to African American students and white students. The importance of this data is that while the Latina/o population has grown over the past several years, bachelor's and master's degree completion is not consistent with the Latina/ population growth.

While enrollment of Latina/o students continues to rise, in particular at community colleges, Latina/o students are not remaining within the higher education environment. In fact "the transition to college is crucial in the retention and success of these students" (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt & Leonard, 2007, p. 406). Thus, as students enroll in college the process of transitioning into college becomes a critical element to ultimate academic success in the long term. The degree attainment in 2006 for Latinas was at 12.8 percent (NCES, 2011). Thus, the

problem therein lies with the retention of Latina students placing closer focus on the period of time during which they transition to college.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework utilized for this study was interculturalism (Tanaka, 2002). The framework of interculturalism developed by Tanaka (2002) stresses that every person has a voice which builds relations and a sense of identity, but at the same time does not make anyone an object of what he/she is saying with his/her voice. The goal of interculturalism is to move "beyond the addition of new voices to focus on the interrelations of cultures as they evolve through time" (Tanaka, 2002, p. 282). The objective of the theory is to place emphasis on the point of contact between cultures and the voices thereof. Tanaka's (2002) concept of interculturalism "builds upon the strengths of modern student development theory" (p. 284). Given Tanaka's (2002) view of interculturalism as a framework or process by which learning and sharing occurs resulting in an even exchange of energy with no single dominant culture, the purpose of the application of interculturalism as a theoretical framework resides within the personal goal as a researcher to clearly and honestly hear the voice of each study participant. As noted by Tanaka (2002) the experience of interculturalism promotes collaboration and a greater sense of identity. Further, the purpose of the study was to provide a platform for Latina/o community college students to tell their stories, according to Tanaka (2002) interculturalism is "the ability of each student to have voice and a forum to tell his or her story" (p. 283). The significance of hearing the voice of each student stresses the clarity of the findings as they will represent students on a personal level, which is instrumental to the overall research project, and at the same time gain an understanding of individual student involvement from each student participant.

The purpose of utilizing Tanaka's (2002) interculturalism theory was an effort to establish a concrete foundation for the study seeking to hear the voices of Latina/os while also seeking to understand their experiences avoiding the assumption of student assimilation. Tanaka (2002) suggested that college campuses are increasingly complex in nature with a range of identifiers such as race, gender and ethnicity. The goal of interculturalism is to nurture each individual voice of every student and to create "positive subjectivities" out of these identifiers (Tanaka, 2002, p. 283). Interculturalism via intersubjectivity reasserts the importance of a personal and social analytical framework instead of one based on institutionalized categories such as "race" (Tanaka, 2002). An additional objective was to understand the level of involvement of the participants so as to determine if their involvement reflected their perceptions of their "subject position" on campus (Tanaka, 2002, p. 283). For example, if Latina/o community college students do not feel as if they have power or voices on campus, they may not become involved. The reverse of this would be that Latina/o students do feel that they have power and voices on campus and are more willing to become involved ultimately doing so. This study focused on placing the voices of the Latina community college students at the forefront while also determining the characteristics and strategies thereof utilized by Latina community college students to transition successfully. Interculturalism promotes that there is no merger of cultures or dominant voices, student involvement theory focuses on "behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development (the *how* of student development)" (Astin, 1999, p. 524).

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a larger study focused on better understanding the perceptions and strategies of Latina community college students' experiences during their transition to college. A qualitative multiple case study analysis (Stake, 2006) approach was utilized, while the data collection involved non-participatory observations and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Latina community college students attending an urban/suburban community college in upstate New York. In addition to the involvement of Latina community college students, an administrator and staff member also participated in individual interviews.

Site and Participants

For the purpose of confidentiality the site and all participants were given pseudonyms. East River Community College (ERCC) is a two-year public institution with an undergraduate population of just under twenty thousand as of fall 2011 (NCES, 2012). ERCC identifies as a large suburban college with campus housing ability; however, ERCC also has a smaller extended urban campus known as West River City Campus (WRCC) in upstate New York. ERCC has an open-admission policy and provides various student services such as remedial services, career counseling, placement services for completers, and on-campus daycare for students with children (NCES, 2012; ERCC, 2012).

Eight Latina students participated in the study and fit the following criteria: (1) Identified as Latina, (2) No previous higher education degree, (3) Enrolled in at least one credit hour attending classes on campus, (4) Transitioned or were in the process of transitioning to community college. Interviews were conducted at the convenience of students either by telephone or on campus and were guided by the interview protocol. There were no student participants who were younger than the age of eighteen years-old. The initial sample objective was to have Latina and Latino students participate, as to balance gender and to reflect the student population; however, there were no Latino students who responded to me regarding an interest in participation in the study, resulting in an all-female sample. Each student participated in at least one individual interview and either a follow-up interview or focus group. Of the eight Latina student participants four were in their first semester, three were starting their third semester, and one was starting her seventh semester. All of the students identified as first-generation students. Three of the participants speak English as a second language and they identified as Cuban, Puerto Rican, Colombian, and Bolivian.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this qualitative study was collected from three sources including focus groups, interviews, and non-participatory observations. Much of the research conducted with focus on Latina/o college student experiences and retention utilize surveys (Zurita, 2004-05). Given the framework of interculturalism (Tanaka, 2002), utilizing the interview and focus group data collection methods enhanced the study and provided two approaches by which the researcher could hear the voices of the study participants. The non-participatory observations did not involve the voices of the students but rather functioned as opportunities for me as the researcher to become familiar with the environment from which data was collected. The three data collection approaches occurred randomly depending on the schedules of the participants.

Students who participated were required to participate in at least one in-person interview or a focus group, and a second interview by telephone or in-person.

The study involved two focus groups on campus. The researcher also conducted at least one individual interview with each student. Students were given a choice to participate in an individual telephone interview or an onsite interview based on each individual student's availability. Interviews provided the researcher the opportunity to explore specific opinions, thoughts and reflections in more depth without threat of pressure or stress that can result from the environment of a focus group (Duncan & Morgan, 1994). The purpose for interviewing each student was to clearly hear the voice of the student without the possibility of another dominant or stronger voice infringing on another, in addition to providing an opportunity to gain clarification from the focus group experience or a follow-up interview. In other words, the individual interview provided the opportunity to have a confidential exchange and for me to gain a clear understanding of the historical context from which each student comes (Creswell, 2009). The interviews provided me the opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of each individual participant as their thoughts and experiences relate to transitioning to a community college. Lastly, for this same reason the interviews with the administrator and staff member were beneficial in that the researcher gained insight as to how the transition experiences of Latina/o community college students are perceived by these two participants.

The primary purpose of observations for this study was to witness activities at the research sites. The researcher conducted non-participant observations in areas based on high activity levels in common areas. The significance of this decision was to prevent the researcher's voice from becoming a component of the data, whereas this decision safeguarded the voices of the participants. The researcher chose the observations sites based on the high activity of specific locations.

The method the researcher used to analyze the data was multiple case study cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006). The analysis strategy involved careful attention and review of the individual details focused on the study participants, which was then followed by analysis of the data for themes and issues. The analysis design also called for the development of similarities among participants. While adhering to the multiple case study analysis as outlined by Stake (2006) the researcher used careful discretion to make modifications throughout the process such as the assignment of participant id's and the development of individual participant profiles.

FINDINGS

The findings from the larger study determined that Latina community college students experience a number of challenges and barriers as they transition to college. Findings also revealed that Latinas develop multiple strategies and approaches as they transition to community college while garnering strength from a reliable family support network. Additionally, the findings contributed to the reconceptualization of transition as a subjective experience unique to each individual student. A primary finding and focus of this article is the silencing of Latina community college student occurring on campus and the development of the silence to resilience pathway often experienced by Latina community college students.

All of the Latina student participants suggested levels of racism, stereotyping, and judgment or fear on campus. As a result of experiencing racism on campus, the Latina student participants shared that feelings and emotions such as sensitivity, frustration, sadness, loneliness, and embarrassment emerged. The response to these feelings was the silencing of Latina students.

Silence occurred in two ways: (1) Latinas were forced to be silent, and/or (2) Latinas chose to be silent, both of which lead to resilience. For these participants silence was utilized as a form of resistance leading to resilience, which became a strategy to navigate and protect their transition. Silence functioned as a defense mechanism to contest, reduce, and resist stereotyping and racism on campus. The silencing of Latinas occurred as a coping mechanism in response to stereotyping and racism and or fear thereof, in addition to feelings of shame for speaking English as a second language and embarrassment for taking non-credit courses. The outcome was motivation, persistence, and academic achievement. As indicated in Figure 1 (Appendix A), this finding involves four phases in the silence to resilience pathway that Latinas encountered: (1) The student participants experienced racism, (2) the participants had emotional reactions, (3) the participants' responses were silence and resilience, and (4) the outcomes of this experience varied (Figure 1). Lastly, throughout the four phases the transition of identity occurred. As Latina students became more self-aware and experienced this process, the individual identity transition occurred. The identity transition involved growing and developing a new identity as a Latina community college student who experienced unique challenges and barriers as a result of being Latina. The identity transition also encompassed gaining an understanding that these barriers and experiences are unique because they are Latina. The process of identity transitioning occurred across the spectrum of these phases, and at times the students were unaware of their identity transitions, while the resilience developed following the silencing.

Emerging from emotions is the response to racism and related factors as Latinas begin their silence. Some of the Latinas alluded to being metaphorically pushed and driven into silence. In fact, silencing is often a result of systemic issues impacted by society. Additionally, silencing may appear to be voluntary, but it must be asked why the silencing occurs and how society influences the silencing. Yet, silence has also worked as a coping and defense mechanism chosen by the Latina to establish a sense of protection for herself. Elsa struggled with socialization in part due to her confidence as it related to speaking English. Elsa shared, "I like being alone." Elsa continued to share, "I'm always by myself and everything like that. I knew high school was going to be serious in order for me to transfer to college and I had my older sister." Elsa stated that she had not participated in student clubs or organizations and that she really focused on work and school. She stated that when she first arrived to college "I just learned to be in the cafeteria by myself this semester because I don't like to be involved with so many people. I like to be by myself." Elsa continued to discuss her silence:

> Still until today I'm afraid to make a conversation with somebody because of my English is not good, and people say but you speak so well. I'm like I need some vocabulary and something but that's how I feel when I try to speak English.

Elsa's silencing is not an indication that her internal self is silenced; she continues to exist and persist on campus and socialize with those whom she deems safe, which in Elsa's case were only family and fellow Latinas. Additionally, several of the participants noted that they think in Spanish; thus, within the confines of their own minds, thinking in Spanish is safe as they are protected from the stereotypes of society. However, Elsa's silence is an indication that while around those who she perceives as racist, those who have demonstrated racism, or those from whom she fears racism is a possibility she asserts her silence. Elsa's assertion of silence did not deter her motivation but rather functioned as a defense mechanism. For example, several of the Latina students shared that they had insecurities relating to their accents. Those insecurities stemmed from previous stereotypes and racist experiences on campus, resulting in the response of silence. Their sentiments suggest "With the silence no one can harm me. With the silence I am

protected. With the silence they will not make fun of my accent. With the silence they will not stereotype me based on my accent." When we discussed the voices of Latinas being heard and the tendency of Latinas on campus to be silent, Dr. Sabio shared that:

> In large contrast here for example with our African-American they speak up, they say what's on their mind. I would say when they are feeling badly and when they withdraw, they speak up their mind and they walk. Our Latinas and Latinos don't do that, they just walk, they don't complain, they just walk. It's I don't like it here so I'm leaving, no complaints.

The problematic aspect to which Dr. Sabio referred was that Latinas are not attempting to reach out, but rather they get to a point of no return and simply leave school without saying a word. This level of silencing is dangerous in that the students have made the decision to leave college, often without plans to return. If Latinas begin to feel safe to be who they are with or without an accent, with or without great math grades, with or without parents who have an education, then they will feel safe enough to talk about their feelings. Until Latinas feel safe to be who they are, many of them will continue to travel this road.

Jeanette provided a summary quote about silencing when I asked her if the college was sensitive to issues of Latinas. She commented that:

> I don't really feel that they are. I know that when the dean had this speech on my graduation, I know he was really concerned, and he really wanted to drive people to go to college. Other than that, once I got to college, they don't really support it. I don't know how to say it.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the most critical aspects of this research, the essence of the study, was supporting and hearing the Latina voice. Finding that the voices of Latinas are often silenced demonstrated how lonely Latinas can be as they transition to college. Statistically Latinas represent a minority status, facing racism and stereotypes, and often attending college as a first-generation student, Latinas experience a level of loneliness that cannot be described or defined in mere words. To have your voice taken from you or to silence yourself as a result of racism and stereotyping or fear thereof, illustrates that the community college environment has a long way to go when it comes to inclusion, diversity, and acceptance. Community colleges must begin the extensive work to detangle how racism is occurring on campus and why. If community colleges can determine the how and why of racism on campus, perhaps they then can begin to move forward with resolutions to eliminate the racism and ultimately end the silencing.

Although the silencing is connected to the resilience, why must Latinas endure silencing to begin with? How can these overt and subtle acts of racism on campus continue to exist given the rhetoric touted by community colleges today? Given that the majority of racism experienced by the participants derived from community college staff, perhaps community colleges need to dig deeper than the annual diversity staff training and truly invest in the awareness of all staff. Further, one might ask since Latinas are experiencing racism on campus, why are they not compelled to go to someone to share these experiences? The answer therein lies once more that Latinas are silenced on campus and without a voice and without someone who is willing to hear the Latina voice, it will remain forever silent. Although resilience occurs and the outcome of the silence to resilience pathway results in motivation and persistence, this is not to suggest that Latinas achieve the power of voice.

The concept of interculturalism (Tanaka, 2002) requires us to avoid the addition of new voices, but rather accommodate, begin to understand and accept existing voices without the integration of a dominant voice. As we understand that Latinas attend community college more than any other type of higher education institution, we must then begin to embrace Latinas and do our part as faculty, administrators, and staff to construct a foundation of acceptance, pride and self-importance. From an institutional perspective Latina needs should be a focus for community colleges. The community college student population has evolved over the years to a diverse group of students including Latinas thus curriculum policies, resources, faculty, staff and administration need to begin to reflect this evolution. Bearing in mind interculturalism (Tanaka, 2002) colleges and universities can begin to better understand the changing student population once these institutions of higher learning begin to embrace the concept that a safe, supportive and academic community can be created through racial diversity.

FUTURE RESEARCH

A key finding of this study is the silencing of Latina community college students. In fact Elsa stated that she is "afraid to speak" while Julia shared that she tried at times to "lose my accent." These findings cannot be denied or ignored and with the development of future research we can then begin to gain a clearer understanding of the interrelated factors contributing to silence. A future study could further explore the silencing of Latinas on campus, but also silencing as it may occur in the community, at home, at work, in high school and beyond. Research must seek a clearer understanding of the silencing of Latinas and not limit research to college campuses given the subjectivity of transitioning Latinas are possibly bringing varying levels of silencing to the college campus with them. In other words, the silencing of Latinas can occur before college enrollment, during the start of their first term, throughout transitioning and so on. Additionally the silence to resilience pathway is not a limited one-time experience through which Latinas pass only once. Again keeping in mind subjectivity depending on the individual Latina, she may experience the pathway several times in life from high school to community college to professional life. A future study may focus more closely on the factors involved in the silencing of Latinas. More specifically, research needs to gain a clearer understanding of the silence to resilience pathway and if this is an experience experienced by Latinos as well as Latinas. A future research study may need to look further into this phenomenon.

The silence to resilience pathway model illustrates that Latinas experience racism, react emotionally, and respond with silence then resilience, shifting then to outcomes such as persistence and motivation, while the transition of identity occur along the continuum of the pathway. As illustrated in Figure 2 (Appendix B) future studies could continue to utilize interculturalism in addition to a number of theoretical frameworks including, but not limited to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Feminist Theory. CRT would contribute to the model as it is focused on changing the relationship between race, racism and power, while LatCrit could contribute to the revision existing campus policies and adoption of new policies keeping in mind the silencing of Latinas. Lastly, Feminist Theory would more closely review the roles of Latinas within the family, community and campus environment while developing an understanding of how the roles of Latinas contribute to the process of silencing. Through these theoretical lenses we can then extend and accommodate the additional factors that are connected to the silencing of Latinas. These theoretical lenses will

provide the researcher an opportunity to pursue exploration of Latina silencing by developing research projects focused on expanding the silence to resilience pathway.

The silencing of Latinas is evident from the findings of this research. Furthermore, there exists a tension among the notion of voice and silence. Future studies could explore how the voice is physically and metaphorically silenced. These projects could focus more closely on how the voice is silenced and who ultimately has the control of the silencing. Are Latina community college students in control of their own voices or are they thrust into a metaphorical silence through which their voice then finds itself and becomes an offshoot of resilience? Additionally, can the concept of voice, as described by Tanaka (2002) be one that represents only the literal voice? In other words, does the exchange of even energy among students require the vocal voice as opposed to the silent voice? Perhaps Latinas are silent at times, while maintaining and preserving their inner voices and personal strength and determination. In the case of several of the student participants the voice that tends to go unheard is the most important voice of all, the inner voice or self-talk. The concepts of voice and the power of voice should be further explored and investigated to develop a clearer understanding of the complex and multifaceted elements of the Latina voice.

CONCLUSION

The silence to resilience pathway represents the often travelled paths of Latina community college students. As Latinas experienced racism they developed emotions ranging from frustration, sadness and loneliness to anxiety and embarrassment. Emerging from their emotions was the response to racism and the related factors as Latinas became silent. Silence worked as a coping and defense mechanism chosen by the Latinas to establish a sense of protection of the *self*. Silence lead to resilience and ultimately the outcomes including motivation, persistence, and academic success. The pathway is often lonely and disparaging as the experience of the pathway begins with racism, stereotypes and judgment of others for being Latina.

The pain of the silence to resilience pathway is deep and brings to light the transition of identity. Latina students discovered that as they transition to community college their identity was in a state of transition as well. The transition of identity occurred along the silence to resilience pathway as the Latina begins to develop her new identity as a result of heightened self-awareness and recognition of her environment that often exposed her to racism. Given the understanding that transition is subjective and no single transition experience can be duplicated, the start, completion, and discovery of the identity transition cannot be identified or pinpointed to a specific time or transition experience.

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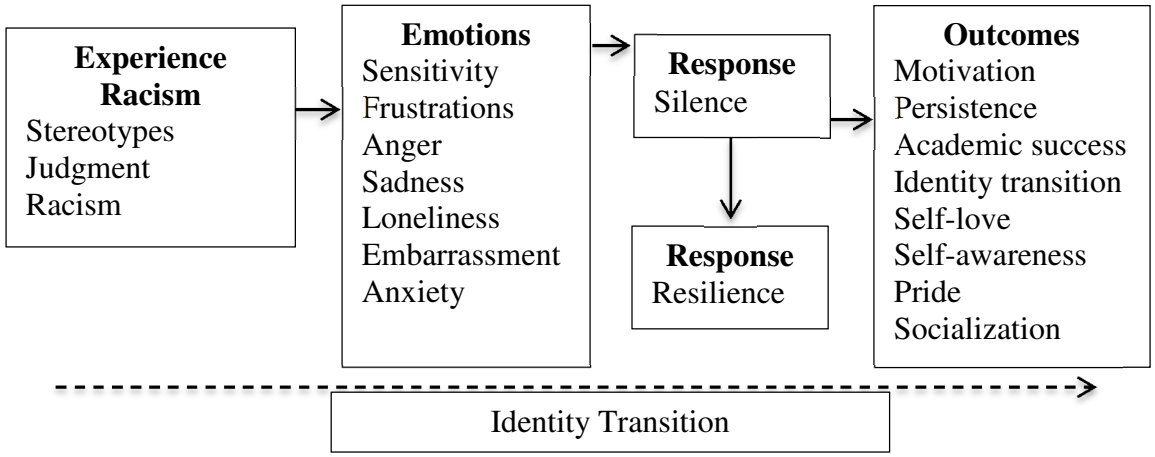
Appendix A

Figure 1
Latina Silence to Resilience Pathway Model



Appendix B

Figure 2
Expanding the Model Through Multiple Frameworks