Narratives lost in the box: The trichotomy of Latina student identity transition stages due to mass media and on-campus stereotyping

Emily Martinez-Vogt
Florida Institute of Technology

ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper is based on a larger study focused on understanding the experiences of Latina community college students. The purpose of this paper is to expand upon the Silence to Resilience Model, which involves four phases that Latinas encounter upon or throughout their transition to community college including: (1) Racism on campus, (2) Emotional reactions to the racism encounter(s), (3) Silence and resilience, and (4) Outcomes ranging from motivation to persistence. Throughout the four phases the transition of identity occurred for the participants of the larger study conducted. The identity transition experience that emerged from the larger study's findings involves growing and developing a new or modified identity as a Latina community college student who experiences unique challenges and barriers due to being Latina. Presented in this paper is the Identity Transition Cycle within The Box, a model involving a trichotomy of stages during which the identity evolves including: (1) Clarity and Insight, (2) Shifting Facet of Self, and (3) Embrace of Self. The identity transition cycle also encompasses Latina students gaining an understanding that barriers and oppressive experiences on campus are unique in that they occur due to being Latina. Although the identity transition that occurs along the continuum ultimately yields itself to an embrace of self, the process of identity transition for Latina community college students is often cyclical and influenced for better or worse by mass media and campus stereotyping.

Keywords: transition, identity, silence, resilience, cycle, mass media, stereotyping

INTRODUCTION

To better understand how Latinas transition to the community college environment it is important to keep in mind that Latina students, for various reasons, have on average not been as likely as white and African American students to complete a college degree (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). In fact, according to Weissman, Bulakowksi and Jumisko (1998) "because the first year is so difficult, racial and ethnic tension can negatively affect Hispanic students' personal and social satisfaction with college" (p. 20). Further, Malaney and Shively (1995) determined that African American and Latina college students experienced high levels of discrimination and harassment resulting in levels of disillusion pertaining to completing the first year of college. The purpose of this article is to expand upon the Silence to Resilience Model (Appendix A), a primary finding from a larger study which had a focus on better understanding the transition experiences of Latina community college students (Martinez-Vogt, 2014).

The immersion of the identity transition along the continuum of the Silence to Resilience Model is a process often experienced by Latina community college students. This process, the Identity Transition Cycle within The Box (Appendix B), occurs along the continuum of the Silence to Resilience Model ultimately yielding itself to an embrace of the inner *self*. The process of identity transition for Latina community college students is often cyclical thus thwarting Latina community college students into an emotional process throughout their transitioning to college and often well after they have transitioned (Martinez-Vogt, 2014). Further, Latina community college student identity transitions through this view involve a number of factors either contributing to or hindering an embrace of the inner self. Through Latina narratives, this theoretical paper explores the connection between the identity transitions of Latina community college students and how stereotyping on campus and mass media influence the stages of the identity transition cycle within the box.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Latinas often find themselves navigating between two worlds while attending college. Moving back and forth from the college environment and the home environment, Latinas face unique challenges revolving around identity. Significant to this paper is defining and discussing the conceptualization of identity. Further, I briefly place focus on how identity functions in relation to the way in which Latinas develop and sustain their identities. Finally, the review of the literature lends focus to the frequently impeding and hindering role of mass media and how mass media portrays Latinas, therefore influencing the view of the *self*.

Defining Identity

Attempting to develop an understanding of the world and the many environments in which we interact with others, Latinas often find that they are involuntarily and at times unknowingly juggling the navigation between these environments while developing flexible identities to accommodate the self within the variety of environments. According to Lopez and Chesney-Lind (2014) "race, ethnicity, gender and class often inform the classification of girls as either 'good' or 'bad'" (p. 528). In fact, a major contribution to the identity development challenges of Latinas and for most women of color for that matter is the very classification of those who do not identify as white. The construct of the well-behaved, mild-mannered, virgin

with blonde hair and blue eyes as the quintessential pillar of beauty and goodness as opposed to the dark haired, brown-eyed, vixen characterized as hypersexual, angry, and uneducated is the very construct to which I am referring. Yet one must ask how these social constructions of race impact or influence Latinas? Lopez and Chesney-Lind (2014) noted that "the available gender scripts for girls of color, particularly Latinas and African Americans, emphasize their innate 'badness' (p. 528). Not a single Latina can escape the stereotyping shadow cast upon them deriving from social construction and motivated by the urge and interest by those in society who seek to maintain the shadow in all of its horror and sadness. Stephens and Phillips (2003) noted the importance to understand that not even a devout and monogamous Latina can avoid speculation of being 'bad.'

So, where might these socially constructed stereotypes of Latinas leave Latinas in relation to identity development and what can that mean? Stonequest (1935) cited that identity is a construct that "marginalize" people of color who often suffer "from alienation, loss of identity, and confusion, and yearning to be accepted by the dominant group" (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999, p. 16). According to Phinney (1996) the concept of ethnic identity refers to "an enduring fundamental aspect of the self that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group and the attitudes and feelings associated with that membership" (p. 922). Stage theorists believe that the development of identity involves a specific order of maturation (Steenberger, 1991). In fact, stage theory notes that identity development is an orderly process by which an individual adapts and grows into each stage of maturity (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Steenberger (1991) goes as far as to state that the identity development model proposed by stage theorists has a number of limitations related to rigidity and linearity, a lack of focus on social influences, and the emphasis on an ideal development that will lead to "pathologizing of the diversity of developmental outcomes among individuals" (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999, p. 18). Yi and Shorter-Gooden (1999) noted that more recent research has led us to an understanding that ethnic identity is more or less about a "transformation of attitudes of persons of color from racial or ethnic self-hatred to pride and acceptance" (pp. 16-17). Thus, the conceptualization of ethnic identity development over time has in and of itself emerged, evolved and continues to be ever-changing.

Prevalence of Mass Media Latina Stereotyping

When considering Latina students, the first year of college presents additional challenges while experiencing the transition process (Bradburn, 2002). More specifically, Latina students transitioning from high school to college often encounter forms of exclusion such as isolation, discrimination, 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). As a result of these sometimes-subtle forms of exclusion, lack of campus involvement and socialization, adjustment issues, and the absence of various forms of support, Latina/o students frequently stop-out or dropout of college during their first year enrolled (Bradburn, 2002). Further, students who leave college during their first year are also less likely to return to college or attain academic achievement thereafter (Tinto, 1987 & 1993).

Although Latino/as represent the largest racial/minority in the United States consisting of physicians, lawyers, corporate leaders and change agents across all sectors (just to name a few), unfortunately the reality of the world is not always accurately depicted on television (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). As a result of stereotyping, Latinas are often systematically forced into

a metaphorical box consisting of stereotypes by which they adhere or defy. Lopez and Chesney-Lind (2014) stated that "the tendency to stereotype Latinas is prevalent in the media…relegating [Latinas] to flat, stereotypical images that emphasize sameness and minimize agency and variety" (Berg, 2002). In fact, Mastro & Behm-Morawitz (2005, 125) noted that Latinas who do get the role are typically cast in roles whereas the character is "addictively romantic, sensual, sexual, and even exotically dangerous'' (p. 125). Although there is limited research in recent years illustrating the portrayal of Latinas in mass media, one must recognize the historical and current impact of Latina stereotyping by mass media and how it contributes to the transition experiences for Latina community college students. With an increasing number of television shows and stations to watch on any given evening, the representation of Latinas consistently remains lagging and the portrayal of Latinas continues to be inaccurate, placing Latinas into stereotypical roles and characterizations that compromise their true identity (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). Although Latina/os are now the largest racial/minority group in the United States they are sparsely found on television and if in fact Latina characters are written into storylines they are most likely characterized in roles that reinforce negative stereotypes. Keller (1994) identified three categories characterizing the roles of Latinas on television including: (1) the Cantina Girl, (2) The Faithful, self-sacrificing senorita, and (3) the Vamp, all of which play into the stereotypes of Latinas (p. 40). Not a single category identified by Keller (1994) portrays a Latina who is a doctor, or a lawyer, or a teacher, but rather the categories all entail violence and hyper sexuality. In recent years, a popular and widely known Latina character propelled and displayed by prime-time mass media was the portrayal of a "hot Latina" played by Eva Longoria in the series Desperate Housewives (Papps, 2005). According to Papps (2005) our cultural climate entails a suggestion that Latinas "are hot and hot Latinas are on fire" (p. 21). Latina characters portrayed by mass media are often seducers with multiple partners who lack a moral compass, and are void of the ability to make decisions that go against the stereotypes of Latinas. Thus, television is not accurately representing the extensive population of Latinas in the United States.

According to Mastro and Behm-Morawitz (2005) research studies have determined that there has been a pattern of underrepresentation of Latinas over the span of more than five decades (p. 111). Further, research has discovered that Latinas have been found to represent only .6%-6.5% of all characters on primetime television as of the year 2007 (Rivadeneyra, Ward & Gordon, 2007, p. 262). Although during the 1950's primetime television incorporated 3% of Latinas in primetime programming, by the 1980's that number fell dramatically to only 1% (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). By the 1990's and throughout the mid 1990's the representation of Latinas on television continued to fall well behind real-world demographics comprising of only 1.1%-1.6% of television representation with a Latina/o population of 11% (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). Thus, the trend of underrepresentation of Latinas on television has and continues to be a longstanding issue and concern.

The Latinas' experiences from the larger study discussed in this paper determined that Latinas experience racism, stereotyping, and identity transitions from the start of their transition to community college. These same students all noted that racism occurred on campus and campus experiences often involved overt or subtle forms of racism. Stereotyping by peers and faculty/staff/administration was experienced by the Latina participants on campus. The often negative and standardized conception of a particular race or ethnicity derived from the media. The most recent example of the negative portrayal of Latinos in the media is the production and release of the movie "How to be a Latin Lover" (2017). The title, the movie trailer, and the

marketing poster all promote a connotation of Latinos as seductive, lustful animals after sex, completely void of compassion, but rather focused on getting off being with and seducing women in the masses. Mass media outlets often use and abuse the image of Latinas, consequently teaching the audience incorrect, simplified, and harmful stereotypes (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). Mass media projects Latinas as a homogeneous group of people from a single race with a fixed socio-economic status and education level and who are capable of limited or broken English language abilities while originating from or being migrants and migrant workers (Guzman, 2011). Although Latinas represent the largest racial minority in the United States and consist of physicians, lawyers, corporate leaders, and change agents (just to name a few) across all sectors, unfortunately the reality of their varying situations is not always accurately depicted on television (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). With an increasing number of television shows and channels to watch on any given evening, the accurate representation of Latinas consistently lags, and the portrayal of Latinas continues to be inaccurate, placing them into stereotypical roles and characterizations that compromise their true identities (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). These stereotypes conveyed and reiterated by mass media, label and stereotype Latinas to be those who speak little or no English, work as streetwalkers, do drugs, are teenage mothers, and are disinterested in receiving educations. Further, stereotypes continue to permeate the college campuses creating an environment in which Latinas face negative labeling and as a result ridicule within the campus community. It is critical to recognize the link between mass media and stereotyping and the impact thereof upon Latina college students and how they develop and maintain identity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Interculturalism

The framework utilized for the original study and for this conceptual paper is 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.

Constructivist Narrative Model

For the purpose of this paper, the construct of identity is influenced by the constructivist narrative model (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). This model to ethnic identity is an alternative to the traditional stage models as discussed previously. According to Yi and Shorter-Gooden (1999) "to view an individual's ethnic minority identity development as fluid, dynamic, and constructed in a relational (interpersonal) context" is a critical approach to understanding identity (p. 18). Further, the constructivist narrative model (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999) notes that "a notion of a constructed self is favored over the essentialist notion of the self, which treats self as if it were a substance or an unchangeable essence" (p. 18). Fundamentally, this model supports the concept of identity as presented in this paper as a changeable, flexible idea or view on one's self in relation to environment and other contributing factors. Lastly, the constructivist narrative model (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999) stems from the idea of identities and self-conceptualizations as an ongoing individual story whereas the "self, then, is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been, but also anticipations of what one will be (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 115). Given this notion of identity as a moving and constant entity, identity is not a fixed thought or view, but rather a changing and fluid, moving concept, the identity transition model presented in this paper can be viewed through such a lens. The next section of the paper introduces the the identity transition model.

IDENTITY TRANSITION MODEL

All of the Latina student participants from the larger study suggested levels of racism, stereotyping, judgment, and 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 (Martinez-Vogt, 2015). 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 (Martinez-Vogt, 2015). The outcome was motivation, persistence, and academic achievement. Overall, 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 (Martinez-Vogt, 2015). 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 process of identity transitioning occurs across the spectrum of these phases, and at times a student may be unaware of the occurrence of their identity transition, while the resilience develops following the silencing. The identity transition involves growing and developing a new

identity as a Latina community college student who experiences unique challenges and barriers o campus as a result of being Latina. The cycle of the identity transitioning as it pertains to this model involves a trichotomy of stages in order: (1) Clarity and Insight, (2) Shifting Facet of Self, and (3) Embrace of Self. This cycle is contained within a box. The box metaphorically represents how stereotypes are developed to control and impede characterizations of Latinas. The first stage that occurs along the pathway of silence and resilience identity transition continuum is when an individual gains new insight and clarity with regard to her identity. The second stage, shifting facet of self, involves the development of a new or modified view of the self. Any aspect of becoming or changing facet/facets of character or self through the process of transition is considered an identity transition experience. The final stage of identity transition is embracing identity and in turn acceptance of the self, instead of trying to change or modify it. The identity transition also encompasses gaining an understanding that these barriers and experiences are unique because they are Latina. Adhering to the concept of interculturalism (Tanaka, 2002) the next section of the paper introduces narratives from the larger study more specifically representing the stages associated with the identity transition stages along the continuum of the silence to resilience pathway. The next section introduces the voices of the Latina student participants from the larger study. The narratives of the Latina students bring to life the stages of the Identity Transition Cycle within The Box.

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. However, student narratives are the primary reference and resource for the narratives.

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 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.

LARGER STUDY NARRATIVES

Alexa struggled with her identity in that, according to her, she often passed as white. She noted that during her transition she felt "alone" and that transitioning was particularly hard for her "because I'm a very concealed person. I don't, not that I have trust issues but I don't just throw myself out there." She continued to share that she was a "private person" and that it was "really hard to be social." Alexa shared that she kept to herself and was hesitant to try to make friends because "I'm just being so different and not that I don't want to try to make friends." A factor contributing to Alexa's anxiety over socialization on campus derived from her family. She stated that "For me, I've always been la Blanca like the white girl in the family because my family…yeah, see I have blue eyes and I have lighter hair." She continued to share "We come in so many different shapes and sizes and colors and people don't even realize that. What does a Puerto Rican look like?...There's no medium…I'm too white to be a Latina and too Latina to be white. Alexa's comments revealed a new understanding of her own identity and the acceptance thereof, thus representing the embrace of her self (stage 3). Alexa's comments question stereotypes and how she has been stereotyped, yet at the same time Alexa was unable to have this inner conversation with her self until she began her experience of identity transitioning. As a light-skinned Latina she challenged stereotypes and began to transition to her new identity, accepting her light skin and both the privilege and burden of passing, she continued to note how she struggled with passing and not feeling completely accepted by others into either the Latina/o community or white community by stating "I'm too white to be Latina but I'm too Latina to be white so I'm in the middle…I mean you're broken." Alexa's narrative provides insight with regard to the challenges faced by Latina community college students in relation to learning to grow and accept her self. The significance of Alexa's story is that she felt torn between two worlds based on the color of her skin and eyes. The impact of feeling torn weighed heavily on Alexa in that she carried her feelings with her to school, work, and home. Alexa found herself confirming her Latina identity to those who doubted she was Latina, which is a reflection of her clarity and insight, but also her beginning to shift her own understanding of her self (stages 1 and 2).

Sandra struggled with transitioning to community college in that she developed anxiety related to her experiences attending a predominantly white high school. Sandra stated that during her first term she "didn't really have friends." When I asked Sandra if she felt that the college was sensitive to issues of Latina students, she placed focus more on her interactions and connections with the Latina/o student community on campus. Sandra's struggle included identity challenges and feelings of being rejected within the Latina/o community on campus and beyond; she stated, "I'm mixed…my mom is actually black and American and my dad is a Latino." She reflected on a new friendship with a Latina on campus sharing "I don't have a really big group of Latina friend here...I have one that I just recently became friends with that went to my school…I

love talking to her because she goes through the same thing as me not like my other friends who were Latinas and they were privileged. It was really nice to talk to her, to talk to her about things that are hard for us. We both go through the same thing in college and everything…I am just not sociable here." Sandra's narrative demonstrates her struggle with her identity and how relating to other Latina community college students can support her socialization at school while reinforcing pride resulting in clarity and insight (stage 1). Further, Sandra's experience demonstrates that stereotypes and bias exist within the Latina community toward Latinas by Latinas.

Prior to her second semester Sandra "didn't really have friends" and provided a reflection with regard to her lack of socialization on campus by stating "I only interacted with white kids. I never had people of color around me besides my family. I never did. My first year was really hard because I told myself when I first came there I didn't really want to interact with them." Sandra's comments reflect that her identity transition involved developing a new conception of others through culturally diverse courses such as Sociology and African American Studies (stage 1). Additionally, the identity transition encompassed Sandra interacting and socializing after her first year of college; thus, Sandra's identity transition involved both a preconception of people of color and an interest in socializing (stage 1). Julia noted that she felt that faculty and peers treated her differently when they heard her accent, "When they know you are not an English speaker, they speak slower or they don't really ask you hard questions." In fact, she noted that she felt that faculty would have lower standards for her in that "They were trying to help me by not giving me the work that they were giving the American-English speakers…they don't challenge you because they think you're not in the same level as Americans. They [faculty/administration] generalize just because I'm Latin.

Julia noted that she became more comfortable with who she was as a Latina when she started to watch popular Latinas on the television such as Enrique Iglesias and Selma Hayek (stages 2 and 3). It was upon seeing these images of Latina/o stars that she "wanted to be identified as a Latin girl." This represents Julia's identity transition. While mass media generally provides the audience with images that are stereotypical and condescending to Latinas, Julie has managed to identify characters and personalities project by mass media who are aligned with her own moral compass and conceptualization of what and who Latinas should be.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of sharing these narratives is to demonstrate how their identities changed over the course of their transitioning to college experiences. Transitioning to community college involves being thrust into a new environment in which Latinas navigate and develop new approaches to earning their education. Latinas are often also the targets of stereotyping and racism, resulting in a range of emotions, silence, resilience, and outcomes positively impacting academic success and persistence. However, along the continuum of transitioning to college and, in particular, the silence to resilience pathway (Appendix A), Latinas develop and redevelop their own identities. Latinas began to experience a heightened state of awareness and individuality while moving forward with the transitioning to college. The notion of identity transitioning relies on the concept that while the Latina student transitions to community college, she also begins to recognize and accept her new personality traits, mentality, and personal convictions while becoming one with her new self. Moreover, the identity transition can begin or conclude at any point during the transition to college (Martinez-Vogt, 2014). Holding true to the

re-conceptualization of transitioning in that there is no fixed or prescribed way to transition, the concept of identity transitioning involves no constriction or restriction, as the identity transition is an individual and very personal experience (Martinez-Vogt, 2015).

Each stage within the identity transition cycle within the box (Appendix B) represents a fluid, moving stage that that is not a fixed state. Each stage is not always defined by a single concept or experience, but rather can be defined by a multitude of experiences leading to the stage level. In the cases of the student participants each student entered and experienced the stages in different ways and at different stages. The identity transition cycle within the box is just that, a cycle. Thus, if a student experiences the stages once, they are likely to experience the cycle again and again, albeit that there is no time constraint thereupon the stages themselves.

The box represents the stereotypes that continue to force Latinas into the cycle often referenced and reinforced by mass media. For example, a Latina who discovers clarity and insight, which leads to a shifting facet of *self*, and ultimately the embrace of *self*, is often driven back to stage one in that she experiences stereotyping on campus and is thrust into the silence to resilience pathway, leading to a re-development or new understanding of identity. The redevelopment of identity stems from the stereotyping experience in and of itself. In other words, the stereotypes within and beyond the Latina/o community constrain and sustain the cycle. Latinas would not be in need of shifting facet and embracing the self were it not for the oppressive nature of stereotyping.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As we begin to understand the identity transition experienced by Latina community college students, it is imperative to continue the research with such focus. An extension of the original research findings could involve a number of research designs and methods. Further, developing research studies exploring the identity transition conceptualization within the silence to resilience model will contribute to our understanding of the experiences of Latina community college students as they embark upon their educational path and throughout their journey while on that path. One such study that could be an extension of this research would involve a qualitative design incorporating both focus groups and interviews of Latina community college students statewide. For example, the original research study from which the silence to resilience model emerged was based on findings from eight Latina participants. Statewide data collection and analysis could affirm the findings.

An additional study could look at the transition experiences of Latino males. A limitation of the previous was the lack of participation of Latinos. The perspective of the findings is rooted solely in the voices of Latinas. An all-encompassing study would involve the participation of Latinos. The previous study found that Latinos were less likely to participate in research. An approach to reaching the Latino student population could be to distribute surveys. Surveys would give the participants an opportunity to share their voices, but at the same time allows participants to avoid onsite and in-person interaction.

A study with a focus on determining the specific role of mass media Latina/o portrayal and identity development could also lend insight as to how Latina/o shape and develop their own identities as they relate to mass media. One could question if and how mass media is impacting Latina community college student persistence. A longitudinal qualitative research study design would incorporate interviews with Latina community college students throughout the duration of their studies to determine if and how mass media impacts/changes Latina student identity.
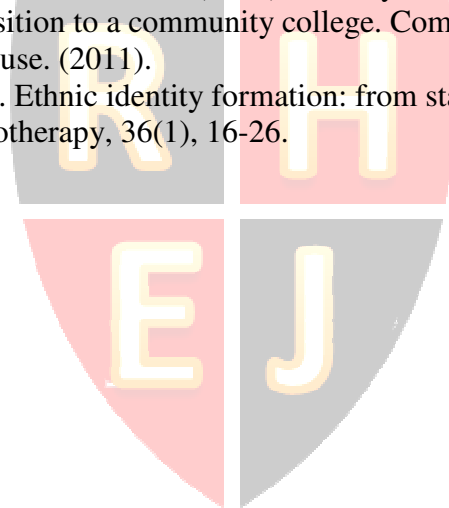
CONCLUSION

With these broader understandings of Latina college student transition experiences in conjunction with identity development, we continue to more closely review and understand factors influencing persistence during the transition process ultimately affecting and at times hindering and delaying the completion of college degrees among Latina students (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). More specifically, it is critical for the research community to listen and hear the voices of Latina students who are experiencing stereotyping on campus and explore how these experiences of stereotyping impact Latinas. The silence to resilience pathway represents the often-travelled paths of Latina community college students. As Latinas experience racism, they develop emotions ranging from frustration, sadness and loneliness to anxiety and embarrassment. Emerging from their emotions is the response to racism thus paving the pathway to become silent, resilient and ultimately motivated. 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 identity transition experience that emerged from the larger study's findings involves growing and developing a new or modified identity as a Latina community college student who experiences unique challenges and barriers as a result of being Latina. The Identity Transition Cycle within The Box is a model involving a trichotomy of stages that have been demonstrated by these narratives. The box represents the metaphorical unit by which the stereotypes withhold Latinas. The stereotypes that impact, influence and often drive the sustainment of the negative characterizations of Latinas by those who do not identify as Latina and also by those who do identify as Latina can negatively or positively effect Latinas and their development of identity. The pain of the silence to resilience pathway is deep and brings to light the transition of identity. Latina students discover that as they transition to community college their identity falls into state of transition as well. The transition of identity occurs 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 the environment, often exposing Latina community college students 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 (Martinez-Vogt, 2014). The narratives in this paper validate that Latinas do in fact experience challenges and barriers on campus that are far reaching into their individual lives impacting identity and in the long run leave long lasting effects.
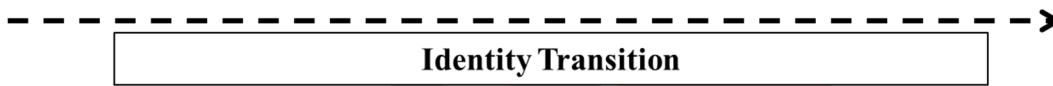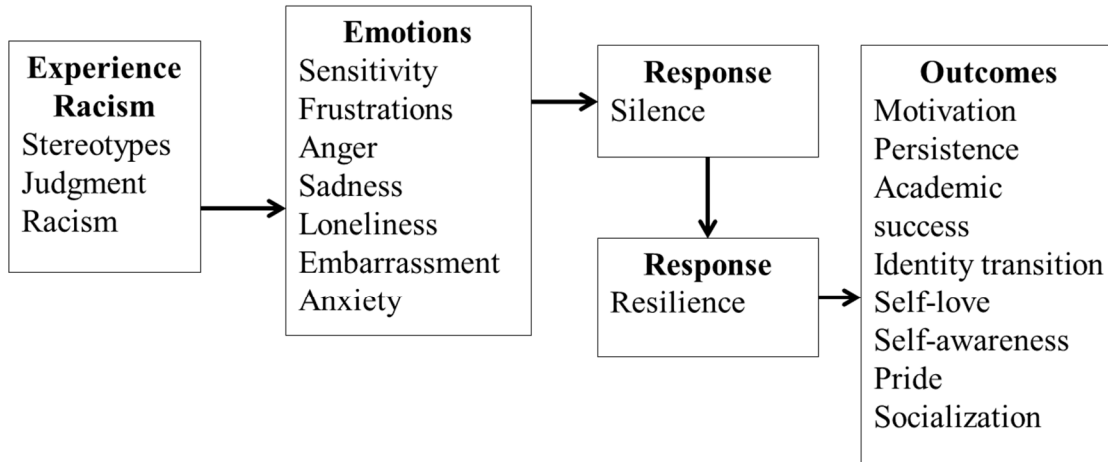
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APPENDIX A

Silence to Resilience Model

Experience Racism	**Emotions**	**Response**	**Outcomes**
Stereotypes Judgment Racism	Sensitivity Frustrations Anger Sadness Loneliness Embarrassment Anxiety	Silence **Response** Resilience	Motivation Persistence Academic success Identity transition Self-love Self-awareness Pride Socialization

Identity Transition

APPENDIX B

Identity Transition Cycle within The Box

Identity Transition

Stereotypes

Embrace of
Self

Clarity and
Insight

Shifting Facet
of Self