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Karina Chavez

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Psychology

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Advancements in Higher
Education for
Latino(a)/Chicano(a) Doctorates

Biography

Karina Chavez is majoring in Psychology. As a first-generation transfer student, it is important for her to understand the educational disparities among Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students. When Karina was introduced to the educational pipeline as a middle schooler, she was rather intrigued as to why the educational pipeline numbers decreased as the educational level increased for Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students. In the future, she hopes to reduce the educational disparity for Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students and other minorities. Karina is also interested in expanding her acquired knowledge and utilizing it internationally. She wants to analyze the styles of curriculum that hinder students of color and support ideologies that help students of color join forces with the education system.

Advancements in Higher Education for Latino(a)/Chicano(a) Doctorates

Abstract

Latinos(as)/Chicanos(as) are one of the minorities least represented in graduate school (Ramirez, 2016). Although there are few studies that primarily focus on the limitations Latinos(as)/Chicanos(as) students encounter in undergraduate and graduate studies, the overall goal of this study was to focus on the strategies Latinos(as)/Chicanos(as) use to counteract these limitations. These areas of limitations fall into seven categories: educational programs, family support, stress, financial support, mentors, school involvement, and exclusion. A 70-question online survey was administered to those who met the following eligibility requirements: completed a PhD, reside in California, and identify as Latino(a) and/or Chicano(a). This survey analyzes the impact educational programs have on first-generation students in undergraduate and graduate school. The questions on family support compare first-generation and non-first-generation college students who completed a PhD program. The questions on stress analyze how the PhD holders overcame stressful situations. For financial support, the survey asks one to comment on the financial resources they utilized. The questions in the section about mentors analyze a mentor's moral, academic, personal, and financial support. For school involvement, the questions analyze the campus resources utilized by respondents and the benefits of utilizing those resources. The questions on exclusion addressed three concepts: discrimination, feelings of not belonging, and gender disparity. In family support questions, results suggest that both first-generation and non-first-generation Latino(a)/Chicano(a) PhD holders received parental support during their undergraduate and graduate studies; however, first-generation PhD holders mentioned that parents would listen but not understand academic context, while non-first-generation PhD holders had academic conversations with parents.

Introduction

Latinos(as)/Chicanos(as) are the minority group that receive the least representation in higher education. Although many researchers have

taken the time to analyze the problems that Latino(a) students encounter when they are attempting to graduate with a doctorate degree, an area that needs further analysis is the impact first-generation parents have on their children's pursuit of higher education. Dumais and Ward (2010) suggest that the higher education the parents receive, the higher correlation of success in college. First-generation students in college can suffer more stress than non-first-generation students when they are exposed to an independent school setting versus an interdependent sector (Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips 2012). Once a student completes undergraduate courses, there are more obstacles to surpass in graduate school. One issue is exclusion; however, if an individual finds the right mentor, they are more likely to complete their PhD (Dixon, 2003). Overall, this study will attempt to analyze the strategies that Latinos(as) and Chicanos(as) use in undergraduate and graduate school to help them obtain a PhD. Each obstacle category was inferred from the established research on Latino(a)/Chicano(a) graduate education. We investigated how Latinos(as)/Chicanos(as) dealt with these obstacles by creating sections of the survey dedicated to each obstacle category.

Undergraduate Studies

Family support

In "The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment," Pamela Davis-Kean suggests that Caucasian children show higher academic scores when their parents are of higher socioeconomic status. Additionally, in "Cultural Capital and First-Generation College Success," researchers found that parents' social class, social worth, and parent involvement were important when enrolling in a four-year institution.

Stress

Stephens et al. (2012) compared cortisol levels on first-generation and non-first-generation students when exposed to interdependent or independent schools. While an independent school focuses on allowing students to self-explore the resources available at college institutions, an interdependent school works as a community to support student success. Stephens et al. (2012) found that first-generation students experienced

more stress than non-first generation when exposed to independent schools. Based on these results, if students are exposed to high levels of stress in independent schools, I would like to know if PhD students used educational programs as a form of overcoming stress in this type of environment.

Educational programs

Huerta, Watt, and Reyes (2013) analyzed how successful students from AVID performed in college and compared those who entered a community college to those that entered a four-year institution. Results showed that AVID students who entered four-year institutions were more likely to stay on track than those who entered community college. Gándara (2001) analyzed different educational programs to define their effectiveness in helping children strive for higher education. The results suggest these programs (i.e., AVID, Puente, Posse, NAI, A Better Chance, Upward Bound, College Pathways, GE college Bound, I Have A Dream, Project GRAD, CPOP, ICPAC, and PEOP) have demonstrated effectiveness in allowing students to achieve higher education (Gándara, 2001). In addition to finding out if educational programs directly helped with independent and interdependent schools, we wanted to see which one most prepared them for graduate school.

School involvement

A Hispanic serving institution (HSI) is a school that serves Hispanics by providing extra services that may help students from Latino(a)/Chicano(a) backgrounds (Doran, 2015). Chun, Marin, Schwartz and Pham (2016) did an analysis on the effects an HSI has on the ethnic pride of Hispanic students. The results suggest that Hispanic students were not stressed from feelings of not belonging in the campus atmosphere, but from adjusting themselves to the dominant campus culture (Chun et al., 2016). The section concerning school involvement was aimed at discovering if students attended an HSI and if so, what resources they believed helped them succeed in college. In addition, we wanted to know if living on campus would allow students to be actively involved on campus.

Graduate Studies

Mentors

One important aspect for students of color besides picking the right college is picking the right mentor (Dixon, 2003). Dixon's (2003) results suggest that 74% of African American doctoral students had two or more mentors in graduate school, but the study did not investigate Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students. In order to identify the strategies used by Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students, our survey asked if the respondents had a mentor and if so, what type of support they received from their mentor.

Financial support

Attending graduate school can be expensive. Doran, Kraha, Marks, Ameen & El Ghoroury (2016) analyzed if students took out loans to cover the cost of tuition and how these loans impacted them psychologically. The results suggested that if the amount of debt was very high, it created stress because students had to put aside other dreams to cover the loans (Doran et al., 2016). Doran et al. (2016) only analyzed graduate students in Psychology, so we incorporated the types of funds Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students among all fields were using to cover for their expenses, as well as what type of fellowships they received.

Exclusion

Ramirez (2016) conducted a qualitative analysis to describe how Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students felt discriminated by university officials, such as department instructors who made derogatory statements (e.g., low-class students should not be attending graduate school). The analysis in Ramirez's (2016) study outlined the limitations in graduate school for Latino(a)/Chicano(a). Herzig (2004) suggests that women of color will be able to complete a doctorate in mathematics if social integration and participation within the college is implemented. As both articles noted, some form of institutional discrimination is often put in place so that minorities do not complete a graduate education. We wanted to know how students addressed the issue of injustice, particularly if collaboration was necessary for Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students to graduate and what resources these PhD holders used in order to overcome obstacles of discrimination.

Exploratory

Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) analyzed the issues Latinos encounter when achieving higher education, such as being expected to financially

support the family. In addition, there are false stigmas that are presented to Latino males that if they go to school, they are seen as too white (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). In order to further investigate the issues affecting Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students, an extra category was created that would analyze the expectancies of males and females since the research on graduate students is very limited. Also, it allowed the participant to reflect on their experience as a graduate student. Additionally, this reflection allowed them to give advice to future Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students as well as give their own thoughts on why other Latino(a)/Chicano(a) students were not going into higher education.

Methods

Participants received an email with general information; within each email there was a personalized 5-digit code to keep their responses anonymous. In addition, we included a link to the online survey in Qualtrics. Once the participant clicked on the link, it would direct them to the consent form; if approved, the participant would proceed onto the online survey. Once in the survey, the questions began with general demographics (e.g., the type of degree they earned) then participants were introduced to questions developed under the seven categories (i.e., mentors, educational programs, stress, finances, family support, exclusion, and school involvement). The survey took between 30 minutes to an hour to complete, depending on the participants elaboration on each response.

Results

General Questions

There were three male and seven female participants. Six identified themselves as Latinos(as). One identified themselves as Chicano(a). Three identified themselves as both Latino(a)/Chicano(a). Participants completed their PhDs at the University of California Davis, Stanford University, University of California Santa Cruz, University of Minnesota, University of Texas at Austin, University of Arizona, University of California Irvine, University of New Mexico, and University of California Riverside. The emphasis in PhD degrees for the participants were Mathematics Education, Literature, Developmental Psychology, History, Social Psychology, Creative Writing and Literature, Philosophy, Curriculum and

Instruction in Education. Five participants took five years to complete their graduate degree, four participants took eight years or more, and one person took seven years. In addition, nine out of the ten participants identified as a first-generation student (i.e., parents did not complete a bachelor's degree) and one person identified as a non-first-generation student.

Undergraduate study

School Involvement. We asked, "Did your school emphasize interdependence (i.e., embrace collectivism) or independence (i.e., embrace individualism)?" Four people said that their school emphasized independence. Three people said their school emphasized interdependence. Two people said their school emphasized both independence and interdependent. One person said they did not enforce either. Two participants that went to a school where independence was emphasized were first-generation students that took an educational program during their undergraduate study. Two participants attended an independent school that were first-generation students but did not take any educational programs. Form the group that selected both independence and interdependent, there were first-generation, and both took an educational program. If the participant selected that they attended an interdependent school, one participant was a first-generation that took an educational program, whereas the other participant was not a first-generation student and did not take an educational program. One participant selected neither he/she was a first-generation student that did take an educational program. The correlations suggest that regardless of the school being independent or dependent, first-generation students are more likely to be a part of an educational program. Whereas, if the student is first-generation, they are more likely to be a part of an educational program.

We asked, "During your undergraduate studies, was your school a Hispanic-serving institution (i.e., a school that receives federal funding to provide resources for Hispanic students)?" When participants were asked if they participated in a Hispanic serving institution nine out of ten said no. We asked, "What resources do you think helped Latinos(as)/Chicanos(as) thrive in a Hispanic-serving institution?" The only respondent said

mentoring, counseling services, financial aid, and career advising were all services that she benefited from.

We asked, “What extracurricular activities were you involved in?” The extracurricular activities that participants were involved in were: Latin(x) student organization, Mecha, Chicano Commencement, Outings Club, Volleyball, Soccer, volunteer activities, Cross Country, Multicultural Greek Sorority, TRIO Program, Major ambassador, Basketball, Swim team, Water polo teams, Sorority, Theater, Chicano Pre Law Association, El Congreso, Intramural Sports, and Student Organization.

Family support. We asked participants “How did your parents provide you with moral support?” From the Nine participants who identify as first generation, five out of ten said that their parents would listen to academic problems. An example of one excerpt says, “Often they did not understand the extent of academic and social pressure” Three out of ten encouraged them to keep moving forward. Two out of ten said their parents brought them comfort food. Whereas, the non-first-generation student stated that his “parents would listen to his academic problems and were interested in subjects and issues in school.”

Respondents were asked, “How did your parents provide you with academic support?” Parents would buy school materials or help with school assignments, visited public libraries and got all materials necessary.

Respondents were asked “How did your parents provide you with financial support?” Parents would help pay room and board, pay for transportation or give the student a stipend. Parents would also pay for tuition fees, cosign loans, or sometimes pay for all four years of education. Participants were asked “If your Parents supported you in another way that has not been stated (i.e., academic, financial, moral) please describe that type of support below).”

One participant said her parents would give her motivational support her parents would say “the only problem that does not have a solution is death”. In addition, the participant said her parents would pray for her. Another participant said her parents knew her shyness and would take individual walks with her. For the second participant, she received support from her parents when she needed car repairs, in addition she was welcomed home whenever she wanted to stay at her parent’s house.

Graduate Study

Mentors. Respondents were asked, “How did your mentor provide you with academic support? If you had more than one mentor, pick the one you spent the most time with.” Four statements said their mentor would offer grant opportunities or help them find grants. Three participants said that their mentor would help them with their writing skills. Two participants wrote that their mentor would guide them with social networking. Two participants said that their mentor would help them select the courses they needed to take. Two participants mentioned that their mentor helped them with their dissertation. Two participants said that their mentor helped them with their research project.

Respondents were asked, “How did your mentor provide you with financial support?” Five respondents stated that their mentor served as a guide to a research assistantship position or that their mentor hired them to collaborate on their research project. Three people said that their mentor would sometimes invite the scholar out for lunch.

Respondents were asked, “How did your mentor provide you with moral support?” Three responses said that their mentor would motivate them. Two responses said their mentor would listen to them. One person said that their mentor introduced them to the department.

Respondents were asked “How did your mentor help you develop as a professional? (e.g., mentor co-authored a paper with you)” Five people stated that their mentor would encourage them to assist conferences. Five people mentioned that their mentor co-authored a publication with them. Four people mentioned that their mentor would encourage them to social network inside or outside of the department. Two responses said their mentors would encourage them to present their research. One statement said that mentors would help with identifying school resources. One response said their mentor would encourage them. One mentor wrote a letter of recommendation for a participant.

Respondents were asked “In what aspects of your personal life did this mentor support you?” Four responses said that their mentor offered suggestions on how to balance the academic and home life. Three responses said that their mentor gave them advice. One person stated that their mentor gave emotional support. One person said their mentor would

listen to them. One person said their mentor guided them through course selections.

School Involvement. Respondents were asked “What academic Programs were you involved in?” During graduate school, graduate students were involved in TRIO Program, International Student Association, La Aldea Graduate Residence Housing, Arizona Assurance Program, Council of graduate students, Chicano(a)/Latino(a) Graduate Association Advanced Seminar in Postcolonial Borderland, and English as Second Language.

Respondents were asked “What extracurricular activities were you involved in?” Social Justice in Education Coalition SACNAS, El Centro Chicano, Soccer, Volleyball(intramural), volunteers, reading group, community political organization, Students Organization (Latinos in UCR), Graduate Student Association.

Respondents were asked, “If you selected fellowship above, please provide the name of the fellowship?” The fellowships are: Diversity Fellowship, Dissertation Year Fellowship, Research Institute for the center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity; Humanities Center dissertation fellowship, NSF Graduate Fellowship and FORD Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship and Conact-UCmexus.

We asked, “During middle school, high school, or undergraduate studies, did you have support from any of the following educational programs?” The programs are: EOP (Educational Opportunity Program), TRIO UPWARD (McNair Scholar, Aspire) and MESA.

Exclusion. “How did you address the feeling that you did not belong in graduate school (i.e., did you utilize any resources on campus, etc.)?” Two people went to seek out peer support. Two used organizations such as TRIO program. Two said they used self-motivation. Two statements said they went to seek out family. One person mentioned that (he/she) used their research in a place that they were comfortable and did not have to deal with discrimination. Another person went to seek academic support.

When asked “What strategies or resources did you use to overcome feeling discriminated against because of your race?” Two people wrote that they just tried to ignore discrimination. Two people used community organizations to express the discrimination they suffered. One of the

organizations that was mentioned is the Social Justice in Education Coalition Group. One person used self-motivation.

Stress. We asked “How did you deal with the academic stress you encountered in graduate school?” Four statements said friendships. Three statements said they would prepare themselves academically by reading books. Two statements said exercise. Two people wrote that they would use the writing center. One person said they would ask for help from faculty and looked for family support.

We asked, “How did you deal with the environmental stress you encountered in graduate school?” One statement said they went through isolation because they had to ignore the stressful environment. Another participant tried to interact with schoolmates so they could guide her in the new environment.

When asked, “How did you deal with the social stress you encountered in graduate school?” One person wrote that they would hide their feelings internally because they did not want to show that they did not belong. Another person would try to engage in extracurricular activities.

One person would walk. Two statements were written on how the individual would seek friends so that they could create a social support.

We asked, “How did you deal with the financial stress you encountered in graduate school?” Two statements said they found jobs. Three statements mentioned that they had to carefully budget the money they had. Two statements said they had to live a very basic lifestyle such as living in simple places.

Respondents were asked, “How did you deal with any other stress you encountered in graduate school?” There were two statements that suggest that peer interaction was a way for them to deal with stress. The peer interaction was with friends or serving as a mentor. One participant said that exercise was a way to alleviate stress. In addition, one participant said she was going through a harsh economic situation and was able to rely on her advisor for moral and economic support.

External Support. Participants were asked, “What percentage of the support that you received came from each group?” We wanted to assess the level of support Latino(a)/Chicano(a) graduate students received from friends, family and parent/guardian. The results suggest that on

average participants received the majority of support from parents, then family member and finally friends.

Participants were asked, “How did your friends help you succeed through graduate school?” Socializing was said ten times. Friends would serve as a leisure companion or the student would discuss issues of graduate school. Encouraging was stated five times. Friends who were in the same department would encourage one another to keep moving forward. Academic support was stated five times. Friends in graduate school would help each other academically.

Respondents were asked “How did your parents provide you with academic support?” No one received academic support from the parent.

We asked, “How did your parents provide you with moral support?” Five out of the seven participants said that their parents would listen to them, whereas three out of seven said they would encourage them.

Respondents were asked “How did your parents provide you with financial support?” Three participants said their parents helped pay school fees and the rest said their parents paid very little.

Exploratory questions. An exploratory analysis was conducted in order to further explore other areas that has not been explored yet, in order to provide future awareness. Participants were asked “If there is something you would change about the time you spend working towards achieving a PHD, what would it be and why?” One out of eight respondents said they would improve their reading skills. Three of eight would improve their writing skills. One person said she would try to avoid being shy. Two out of eight would try to reduce their stress. Others suggested they would have more social interaction, attend Latino(a) associations, and try to balance academic and personal lifestyle.

We asked, “If you could give advice to a Latino(a)/Chicano(a) student in pursuit of a PhD that is within your field of study what would it be and why?” The top five answers people suggested students try to develop social networks inside and outside the program. Secondly, two out of the ten suggested that students should be persistent and use campus resources. Other responses were: have a strong feeling of pursuit for your degree, read academic books, research programs and universities, ask for help, exercise, find a mentor, involve your family and work with colleges.

Respondents were asked “When Latino(a) students are trying to choose where to go to graduate school, what advice would you give them and why?” Two people suggested to pick the right school that is doing similar research as you are and not because of the level of prestige the college has. Two people suggested to find the right mentor. One person wrote that students should focus on their reading and writing skills. One person said that they should try to visit as many schools as possible. Within the same context it was suggested that students should try to not eliminate private schools. In addition, someone said students should try to find the perfect environment that suites them academically and physically. One person stated to trust your gut feeling when you have to pick a school as your final decision.

We asked, “What do you think were the reasons why Latinos(as)/Chicanos(as) students did not complete their doctorate within your field of study?” Three professors said that their peers did not have an adequate advisor. One person mentioned that their peer was not goal oriented, one person mentioned their peer had family obligations, another person lacked motivation, and lastly, they did not have the cultural capital.

We asked participants, “What obstacles do you believe are presented to only Latinas/Chicanas before or during graduate school?” Only Female respondents were allowed to answer this question. Female participants said: go against family expectations, imposter syndrome, guilt for leaving family, parents lack of understanding, lack of financial resources, Assumptions that women are servants, Men don’t acknowledge women’s opinion, limited self-confidence and self-esteem, and need to help their families financially

Respondents were asked a follow-up question: “If you confronted any of the obstacles you mentioned in the previous question, how did you overcome these obstacles?” One person wrote that she lived with the guilt. One participant said she relied on education programs such as TRIO and McNair to help her through the issue. Another participant described in order to address parents lack of understanding she would dialogue with her family members so they knew more about the work she was doing. In order to address her imposter syndrome, the participant said that she frequently went to the writing center. In addition, in order for her to

understand the American culture she would assist on campus activities. She also went to seek therapy in order to improve her self-esteem.

We asked participants, “What obstacles are presented to only Latinos/Chicanos before or during graduate school?” Only male participants were allowed to answer this question. Three responses said they felt there were little Latino mentors, a black and white binary does not apply to Latinos, a devaluation in the Chicano studies department of males. Two professors mentioned that there is a systematic marginalization against males in education. Respondents were asked “If you confronted any of the obstacles you mentioned in the previous question, how did you overcome these obstacles?” One male participant described that he was able to organize peers in his department so that together they would update the training, curriculum and provide professional guidance. One resource the male participant used was that he did not wait for the information to come to him he seek out the information and he received more information that applied to other areas. Another participant would publish more articles, presentations, and teaching. The participant described it as doing extra work to get noticed.

Discussion

Undergraduate Study Questions

Only one participant attended an HSI. One possibility that contributed to this, is that HSIs have only recently been incorporated into schools throughout the United States. When participants were asked if they lived far from campus the intention was to try to figure out if students who lived closer to campus were more likely to be more involved with school activities. The results suggest that whether they lived on or off of campus, they participated in school activities. However, it is important to consider that the participants who took the survey lived within a ten-mile radius of campus.

Graduate Study Questions

In the mentor section, we provided examples, and as we feared it seemed that most participant responses were phrases like the examples. In addition, when we asked how mentors would help them academically, many PhD holders stated financial support as an academic support even though financial support was its own category. In the stress section, one

concept that stood out consistently in the different categories was social support.

Exploratory questions

There was a set of questions that were asked to only female respondents and one question asked to only male respondents regarding how gender affected their ability to be in graduate school. It was interesting to see how cultural traditions affect each gender. The traditional view of women is that they have to be in the family and not seek independence. For most females who went to graduate school they mentioned guilt as a limitation while they were in graduate school. While men noted that there were few examples of males like them in graduate school, they were held to the same expectations as women.

Limitations

In this preliminary study, participants were recruited because using colleague reference or because of their affiliation with San José State University. There were a total of 70 questions and participants did not receive any type of compensation for their time, so the low number of respondents may have been due to the survey inducing fatigue. Out of ten participants, only eight participants completed the entire survey. One reason there were several questions is because the research on Latino(a)/Chicano(a) PhD students is very limited, so we wanted to expand the knowledge on other areas that may be hindering students.

There were two questions that one respondent misinterpreted and wrote about their experience as a professor rather than their experience while earning their PhD, so the responses had to be left out of the analysis. There were several questions that were addressed in undergraduate studies and graduate studies because we believed they would yield different results, yet our analysis revealed that many of the participants received the same assistance during undergraduate and graduate studies. Another limitation in the undergraduate section the participants were not asked what undergraduate school they attended. It would have helped to have recorded this information to help identify the resources at different schools. Finally, we did not formally ask first-generation students how they coped with stress in the interdependent and independent school environments.

Conclusions

Many participants struggled with one form of stress in undergraduate and/or graduate school. Some common strategies that participants found to cope with stress were to exercise and to socialize. There were no differences in school involvement if the student was living on or off campus, as all participants managed to get involved in on-campus activities. One strategy for students who are pursuing higher education is to get involved on campus wither by targeting your strengths or seeking help on your weaknesses. The support of a mentor was a crucial component for every respondent. Many professed that their department had few Latino(a)/Chicano(a) professors which made it difficult to relate to the program. Family was a central part of every respondent's life. Parents of first generation respondents demonstrated their support through there auditory skills. If the parent did not experience any of the problems that the student had gone through they would always motivate them by helping to find a solution to their problem. Many participants received financial support from their parents or took out loans besides the scholarships and fellowships they received. While many of the participants suffered through discrimination, some participants decided to not detail their issues, yet others looked for outside resources that supported their concerns as students. Many Latinos(as) dropped out of graduate school because they were in the wrong program or family commitments were higher. One piece of advice that was given is for students to find the right mentor and program because it is a long-term process and you should not select a school because of prestige. In addition, gender differences were evident in female guilt for leaving the family behind whereas for males dealt more with institutional marginalization. Many females sought psychological help or relied on educational programs. The males were able to find the proper resources on campus to address the issues in the department. The males worked hard to be noticed and prove to the department and faculty that they held misconceptions of Latina/Chicana students.

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