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# The Vanishing Latino Male in Higher Education

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Latino male students are “vanishing” from the American education pipeline, a trend that is especially evident at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The question of why Latino males are vanishing from America’s colleges is complex, and this scholarly article explores some of the socio-cultural factors, peer dynamics, and labor force demands that may be conspiring to propagate this trend. The authors expound on various theoretical and empirical explanations for this persisting and troubling trend.

**Keywords:** *Latino males; Latinas; males of color; gender norms; cultural deficit; educational attainment; education pipeline*

Latino<sup>1</sup> males are effectively vanishing from the American higher education pipeline. Even as the number of Latinas/os attending college has actually increased steadily over the past few decades, the proportional representation of Latino males continues to slide relative to their Latina female counterparts (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). This trend has been especially evident in secondary and postsecondary education in recent years, as Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school, to join the workforce rather than attend college, and to leave college before graduating (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). In general, proportionally fewer college-age males are actually enrolling in college than in years past, and the degree attainment gaps between Latino males and females is widening (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005; Saenz, Perez, & Cerna, 2007). Despite these trends, empirical attention to this issue has been minimal, and public outcry has been almost nonexistent (i.e., with a few notable exceptions).

Indeed, the public discussion of an academic gender gap is sometimes met with skepticism at the thought of a reframed discussion of traditional gender dynamics within education. Historically, the assumption has been that the educational system is set up to favor males (Connell, 1993; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000), the consequences of which have been such policy initiatives as Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the Equal Opportunity in Education Act. The increasing success of women at all levels of education—although providing for more nurturing

environments for women in schools, workplaces, and cultural arenas—may ultimately have an unanticipated affect on male development, especially during early adolescence (Clayton, Hewitt, & Gaffney, 2004). Recent educational attainment data clearly suggest that young males are struggling to keep up with their female peers at each level of education and across all racial and ethnic groups, especially in accessing higher education (NCES, 2005). This is not to suggest that the success of girls has been assured or that it has come at the expense of male students, as structural and gender inequalities remain pervasive in America's schools (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Nonetheless, when we conjoin the growing gender gap with the persistent educational attainment gap between Latinas/os and other racial and ethnic groups in this country, the phenomenon of the vanishing Latino male is cause for even greater concern. The question of why Latino males are losing ground in accessing higher education—relative to their Latina female peers—is an important and complex one, and it lies at the heart of this article.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

Commissioned for the 2008 annual conference of the American Association for Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), this scholarly article explores why Latino males are disproportionately disappearing from the ranks of secondary and postsecondary education. Specifically, we expound on various theoretical and socio-cultural explanations for this persisting and troubling trend facing Latino males. We begin by first accounting for key differences in early childhood, primary school, and secondary school experiences between boys and girls. We assign a special focus to the divergent ways in which boys and girls learn in their early developmental years, as such experiences can ultimately manifest themselves in ways that can perpetuate the current gap between the sexes among Latinos in higher education.

We also explore cultural and gender norms within the Latino community that may serve to offer insight into this persisting disparity. For example, the expectations for the Latino male to work in order to contribute to the family's well-being remains a salient experience for many, as does the role of the stay-at-home caregiver for Latina females (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Moving along the education pipeline, we further explore the factors that can facilitate college access and degree attainment for Latino males. Finally, we delve into alternative career pathways that may be attracting college-age Latino males away from higher education and directly into the workforce. This includes a discussion of the role of the military in recruiting away talented Latino males as well as the predominance of Latino males in the U.S. prison system.

In exploring the dilemma of the vanishing Latino male, we are especially sensitive to avoiding a cultural deficit paradigm in answering our guiding research question for this scholarly article. The appeal of simple-minded and culturally laden explanations

is all too often fodder for poor policy making and the perpetuation of stereotypes about this complex group of students. Instead, we employ our heightened sensibilities with regard to Latino socio-cultural norms to complicate our understandings about the multifaceted aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Although it is necessary to focus on cultural norms and artifacts in a discussion as sensitive as this issue, it is not necessary to adopt a lens that assigns blame as a result of a students' gender, culture, language, or ethnicity. Accordingly, our approach in exploring why Latino males are struggling to keep pace with their peers focuses instead on the underlying social, cultural, structural, and systemic issues that may serve to perpetuate the gender gap in college enrollment and degree attainment. An additional goal of this article is to make a case for a broad-based research agenda that will provide a roadmap for future research work that is not solely focused on observing trends but, rather, is focused on evaluating and documenting successful intervention strategies and education initiatives that may serve to inform future policy and practice.

## Background and Rationale

The question of why Latino males are vanishing from higher education invites even more questions: If college-age Latino males are not going into higher education, then what happens to them? *Do they drop out of high school?* In 2004, 28.4% of Latino males 16 to 24 years old were high school dropouts, compared with 18.5% of Latino females, 7.1% of White males, and 13.5% of African American males (NCES, 2005). *Do they enter the workforce, and if so, in what fields?* Low education levels among Latino male workers can translate into higher concentrations in low-skilled jobs (e.g., construction, agriculture, manufacturing, and retail services) and lower concentrations in high-skilled occupations (e.g., architecture, engineering, legal, sciences, and health care) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). *Are they institutionalized in greater proportions than other groups?* A recent report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that Latinos make up 20.9% of the 2.1 million male inmates in federal, state, and local prisons (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2007). Among the institutionalized population of Latino males, 63.1% of them are between the ages of 18 and 34 (Sabol et al., 2007), which is the primary age range for attending college. In addition, the ratio of Latino males in jail to those in college dormitories is 2.7 to 1 (Sabol et al., 2007). *Are they attracted by a military career?* In 2003, approximately 13,000 Latino males between the ages of 18 and 24 were non-prior service enlisted in the U.S. military (U.S. Department of Defense, 2003). Latinos made up 17.7% of the "infantry, gun crews, and seamanship" occupations in all the service branches, which are the positions most directly related to combat (Mariscal, 2004).

Each of these discussion points addresses some of the possible ways in which college-age Latino males are diverted away from postsecondary opportunities immediately after high school. Yet, as scarce as our young men are becoming along the

higher education pipeline, it is even more difficult to find meaningful and timely research focused on the causes behind this perplexing trend. There is, however, a growing chorus of practitioners and scholars who are taking careful notice of this gender gap and what it could portend for future generations of Latinos.

For example, a symposium convened by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute in fall 2005 framed the issue of the disappearing Latino male as an “unacknowledged crisis.” In spring 2007, the Center for Community Development and Civil Rights (CCDCR, 2007) at Arizona State University organized a meeting of educators and researchers to discuss best practices for preventing the Latino male dropout crisis. Morehouse College hosted a symposium in 2001 entitled *Reconnecting Males to Liberal Education*, which convened a diverse collection of scholars, community leaders, and students from around the country to discuss whether ongoing discriminatory practices in education contribute to a trend of low and declining completion of a college education among young Black and Latino males. Also, a recent report by Excelencia in Education (2007a) helped to synthesize census data to give sharper focus to the scope of the Latino male educational crisis, indicating in no uncertain terms that the numbers are more dismal than ever.

The crisis is real, yet it remains ambiguous and undefined, a point that is all the more disconcerting considering the economic and social consequences that it could portend. From an economic perspective, the gender gap in educational attainment could manifest itself in a curtailment of the skilled labor force as well as a decrease in labor productivity (Center for Labor Market Studies [CLMS], 2003). Given the ongoing demographic shifts that point to a younger, more Latino labor supply, this population represents the fastest growing employment pool yet the most underutilized talent pool. America’s human capital capacity and global competitiveness will be increasingly dependent on this growing segment of the population (Maldonado & Farmer, 2006). From a social perspective, Latino male roles as spouses, fathers, and role models for young men could be challenged as a result of their continuing struggles on the educational front. Ultimately, these trends could undermine their ability to fulfill the critical economic and social roles that are keys to secure and prosperous families and communities. To fully understand why Latino males are vanishing from our higher education system, we begin with a look at the early, primary, and secondary schooling experiences.

### **The Experiences of Latino Males in Early, Primary, and Secondary Schools**

Discussions of fairness and gender equity in our public schools have often focused on the academic achievement of girls and the ways in which they are disempowered by an educational system that tends to favor boys (Connell, 1993;

Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). As part of this narrative, the conventional wisdom has been that girls have had it much tougher in schools—especially at the primary school level—whereas boys can fend for themselves. Although schooling remains a sexist practice in many respects, girls now outperform boys on almost every academic indicator in elementary and secondary schools (Crosnoe, Riegle-Crumb, Field, Frank, & Muller, 2008). Yet, the unchallenged assumption is that girls are struggling in schools and, conversely, that boys are not (Connell, 1993). These gendered stereotypes are woven into the very fabric of our well-intentioned schooling and socialization processes, so much so that some would deem it unconstructive at best or cynical at worst to even engage in a discussion of the schooling problems of our young boys. Worst yet, there are those who worry that too much attention to the problems of boys may detract from the significant progress and many worthy advances of girls within our educational systems (CLMS, 2003; Crosnoe et al., 2008). In light of the growing gender gap in educational attainment across all racial and ethnic groups (especially among Latinos and African Americans), perhaps the pendulum has swung too far to one side in terms of the crisis now facing young boys. The suggestion here is not to focus on one sex at the exclusion of the other, but rather, to not be neglectful of the unique challenges faced by both male and female students.

### **The Early Schooling Years**

Boys are struggling academically relative to their female peers, and their problems are increasingly evident during the impressionable early schooling years. For example, there continue to be observable differences in enrollment rates between male and female students in early childhood education, especially among Latino and Black children. In 1990, 33.6% of Latina females younger than age 5 were enrolled in school on a full-time or part-time basis compared with 28% of Latino males in this same age range (NCES, 2007). By 2000, the gender gap had grown even larger, although the most recent data for 2006 suggest that the enrollment gap has closed for Latinos. Although this represents a promising finding, it should be noted that Latinos still lag behind their White and Black peers (see Table 1) on this early indicator of school enrollment. Early schooling enrollment gaps across racial and ethnic groups tend to close by kindergarten; nonetheless, Latino children still remain less prepared for the early grade levels, partly as a result of lower enrollment rates at the younger ages (Excelencia in Education, 2004).

Participation in early childhood education can significantly affect early academic success for students. Alexander and Entwisle (1988) noted that by the third grade, a child has established a pattern of learning that shapes the course of his or her entire school career. Thus, many boys who are turned off to school at a young age may have a difficult time rediscovering the motivation to become successful learners later in their

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of the Population Aged 3 and 4 Years Enrolled in School**

Year	Males			Females		
	White	Black	Latino	White	Black	Latina
1980	39.2	36.4	30.1	35.5	40.0	26.6
1990	47.9	38.1	28.0	46.6	45.5	33.6
2000	54.1	58.0	31.9	55.2	61.8	40.0
2006	58.3	58.0	49.1	58.1	61.0	48.5

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Table 6 (2007).

NOTE: Includes enrollment in any type of graded public, parochial, or other private schools. Attendance may be on either a full-time or a part-time basis and during the day or night.

educational pathway. Gurian and Stevens (2005) suggest that boys are being educated within a system that is unaware of the potential mismatch of the male learning style in current educational practices. They note that boys are an average of a year to a year and a half behind girls in reading and writing skills. Boys in grades 4 through 8 are twice as likely as girls to be held back a grade, and the rate is even higher for boys of color (Shaffer & Gordon, 2006). The mismatch in learning styles engenders a disconnection for boys, leading to a “steady diet of shame and anxiety throughout their elementary school years, and from it they learn only to feel bad about themselves and to hate the place that makes them feel that way” (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, p. 26).

Further complicating this issue of academic underachievement is the pervasive “boy code” that shapes the identity development of boys at an early age, a code that includes the set of behaviors and rules of conduct that are inculcated into boys by our society such as being strong, tough, and independent (Pollack, 1998). For Latino males, the “machismo” archetype only serves to reinforce these codes through a culturally infused lens, even as gender roles for Latinos are very much in flux. As a result of these social expectations, boys tend to brag as a way to hide their lack of academic confidence, a façade that they erect to hide their perceived weaknesses and vulnerabilities (Pollack, 1998). Feeling ashamed of such vulnerabilities, boys tend to mask their emotions and ultimately their true selves, causing a socio-psychological disconnection that can lead to feelings of failure, helplessness, and even depression. Slocumb (2004) suggests that boys have a lack of emotional language and literacy with which to effectively express their feelings or to ask for help, yet another sign of weakness. Pollack (1998) also notes that the rate of depression among boys is surprisingly high, and statistics suggest that adolescent boys are three times more likely to commit suicide than adolescent girls (Snyder & Swahn, 2004). Overall, Latino youths are at great risk for attempting suicide and at increased risk for nonfatal

suicidal behavior when compared with youths of several other minority groups (Canino & Roberts, 2001). In short, boys are substantially more likely to endure disciplinary problems, exhibit suicidal and depressive tendencies, be suspended from classes, and actually drop out of school (i.e., see for example Figure 1a).

### **“At Risk” Labels and Overrepresentation: Learning and Behavioral Challenges**

The dissonant learning styles between boys and girls in the early schooling years have other consequences that may serve to redirect boys away from traditional educational pathways. For example, boys are twice as likely as girls to be labeled “learning disabled,” they are seven times more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and they constitute up to 67% of the special education population, and in some school systems, are up to 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with serious emotional and behavioral disorders (Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Pollack, 1998). Relating to this is one of the most long-standing critiques of special education practice, namely, the disproportionate placement of students of color in special education programs, referred to in the education literature as overrepresentation (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Since the late 1960s, the U.S. Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has reported the pervasive problem of overrepresentation of minority children in certain disability categories (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Dunn, 1968; Ferri & Connor, 2005), and the disparities are even more pronounced for male students of color. For example, Parrish (2002) notes that Latino students are more likely to be overrepresented in special education, and recent data suggest that they tend to be especially overidentified during their high school years (Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). Overrepresentation results in a form of ability tracking, sometimes referred to as second-generation segregation (Ferri & Connor, 2005). This overrepresentation is even more pronounced among Latino and Black males (Losen & Orfield, 2002), which makes their college pathways that much more difficult to navigate. The problem of stigmatization begins much earlier in the education pipeline, as children from economically poor Black or Latino families are increasingly labeled with the ill-defined “at risk” category even before they enter school (Mutua, 2001).

### **Social, Cultural, and Structural Pressures Facing Latino Males**

Another phenomenon that plays a conspicuous role in the schooling experiences of young males of color, especially within urban settings, is the notion that Black and Latino males somehow reject academic excellence because they perceive it as “acting White.” Some scholars have argued that norms of academic success among minority males are defined by perceived notions of White pursuits and values of



success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). As such, disidentification with academic success for minority males is reflected in the phenomenon and stigma of acting White that pervades peer interactions (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Osborne, 1999). On the other hand, males of color are often confronted with a slew of negative stereotypes related to their behavior, peer groups, or lack of academic competency (Shaffer & Gordon, 2006).

Scholars suggest that Black and Latino male students in urban contexts often invoke the phrase “acting White” as a form of social control in within-group interactions or as a way to rebuke group members who may be acting like “sell-outs” (Horvat & O’Connor, 2006). On the other hand, Carter (2005) argues that minority males use phrases such as “acting White” for cultural reasons related to facilitating in-group solidarity and to assert cultural symbols of pride and self-worth, and not necessarily as a show of opposition against norms of academic success. Her critical analysis suggests that academic success has no color and that usage of such terms among young males is more consistent with cultural affirmations than with cultural deficits.

Nonetheless, the combined peer and cultural pressures facing minority males to fit in and to not be outwardly successful in school among their peer group can be manifested in their desire to not act White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The character of Cedric in the book *A Hope in the Unseen* (Suskind, 1999) typifies the experiences of ridicule, exile, and peril that can accompany a successful Black student’s journey through an urban school setting. The stigma of acting White among minority males is ultimately a reflection of their lack of identification with traditional norms of academic success, which ultimately results in their devaluing of academics and education in the traditional sense (Osborne, 1999). Therein lies an enormous problem, that traditional norms of academic success have not worked for minority males. So, perhaps the true problem lies with the traditional academic structure itself.

Latina/o students are disserved by an entrenched educational system that does not acknowledge—much less honor—their unique cultural heritage and distinct ways of knowing about the world. Angela Valenzuela’s (1999) book *Subtractive Schooling* chronicled how the assimilationist culture of traditional American schools works to “subtract” from Latino youth their definition and appreciation of education. Schools, she argues,

instill policies and practices that are designed to divest Latino students of their culture and language, and a key consequence of these subtractive elements of schooling is the erosion of students’ social capital evident in the presence and absence of academically oriented networks among immigrant and U.S.-born youth, respectively. (p. 20)

She employs the term “subtractive schooling” to argue that the structure and culture of schools can be detrimental and subtractive to the academic progress of Latinos.

In Kozol's 1991 book *Savage Inequalities*, he too exposes America's public school systems as having divergent extremes of wealth, opportunity, and segregation that form structural barriers that discourage the academic success of poor and minority youth. Indeed, Latino students are among the most segregated minority groups in schools, segregated along racial, socio-economic, and even immigrant characteristics (Orfield & Gordon, 2001). Schools where minority students are increasingly concentrated are among the most underresourced, understaffed, poverty stricken, and neglected schools in the country (Saenz, 2005). Such extremes translate into gross inequalities that result from unequal distribution of school funding, underprepared teachers, high teacher turnover, and poor administrative leadership. School inequalities are yet another example of the structural pressures faced by Latino males on their pathways to college, and such pressures are much more insidious than test scores or peer climate as they are deeply institutionalized forces.

Another structural issue affecting Latinos on their pathway to college is the lack of Latino males in the teaching workforce. In 2007, results of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Current Population Survey* noted that approximately 7% of all elementary and secondary teachers were Latina/o. Of the close to 4 million teachers employed in K-12, only about a quarter were male, indicating that the proportion of Latino male teachers is much lower than females at all grade levels. Zapata (1988) argues that minority teachers are critical because they may be better equipped to meet the learning and mentoring needs of an increasing proportion of the school population than teachers from other backgrounds. In addition, minority male teachers can serve as role models for minority male students. The lack of Latino male teachers at all grade levels underscores another structural obstacle for Latino males as they navigate the college pathway.

To suggest that either social stigmas or structural inequalities are to blame for the low rates of educational attainment among Latino males only reveals part of the story, yet these issues do serve to highlight the social, cultural, and structural dimensions at work within the Latino male educational experience. Regardless of the context (e.g., urban, rural, immigrant, etc.), peer and cultural pressures among young males are strong and influential forces. Furthermore, structural inequities are pervasive issues within our educational systems that continue to disparately affect poor and minority communities. Latino males have the added demands and expectations that can be brought on by their Latino patriarchal and cultural norms.

### ***Familismo* and Latino Males**

One of the more important and enduring cultural values among Latinos in the United States is *familismo*, which involves the strong identification and attachment to immediate and extended family. The value of *familismo* is embodied by strong feelings of loyalty, responsibility, and solidarity within the Latino family unit (Marin & Marin, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Such loyalty and obligation are often accompanied by strong desires to provide financial and emotional

support for the family, qualities that hold constant across generational lines and immigrant status (Marin & Marin, 1991). In many respects, the *familismo* orientation among Latino families serves to define gender roles and expectations for family members such that sacrificing the needs of the individual over the needs of the family is commonplace.

Within this framework, Morales (1996) writes that the Latino male's responsibility is to "provide for, protect, and defend his family" (p. 274). Young Latino males are raised with the expectations that they are to be family oriented, strong, brave, hardworking, and family contributors. Even as gender roles within the Latino culture are in a constant state of flux, the patriarchal norms remain salient in the everyday lives of young Latinos, filtered through an acculturation process that remains perpetual as a result of a steady flow of Latino immigrants into this country.

The expectations to work, contribute to the family, and assume traditional gender roles remain a predominant characteristic of the young Latino male experience. Young Latino male immigrants tend to be even more susceptible to prevailing cultural and gender roles (De Leon, 2005), and the pressure to work once arriving in this country is even more urgent (Fry, 2005). Many foreign-born Latino males who arrive in late adolescence are likely to be labor migrants. They come to the United States to work and not to attend college (Fry, 2005). Ultimately, the social, familial, and socio-economic pressures faced by young Latino males (foreign born or native born) may manifest themselves in the decision to join the workforce earlier than their Latina female peers, indefinitely passing up the opportunity to seek a postsecondary education.

Nonetheless, the notion of *familismo* among Latino families should not be seen as a negative force working to perpetuate gaps in educational attainment between males and females. Indeed, scholars have noted that *familismo* can serve as a strong social network and form of social capital that can facilitate lifelong educational success (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Accordingly, *familismo* can work as a socio-cultural asset to assist young Latino males and females in navigating the educational system. For Latino males, the value of *familismo* can be an asset because of its correlation with strong social and family networks, which can ultimately be accessed to support their academic achievement (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994).

## **A Demographic Profile of College-Age Latino Males in the United States**

The main purpose of this scholarly article was to investigate why college-age Latino males—relative to their Latina female peers—are vanishing from throughout the higher education pipeline. The first half of this article focused on various theoretical and culturally relevant explanations for this persisting trend facing Latino males. We accounted for key facets of the early childhood, primary school, and secondary school experiences for Latino males, and we also explored some of the social,

cultural, and gender norms within schools and within the Latino community that may offer insight into this persisting disparity. The second half of this article focuses on demographic and educational characteristics of the Latino male population as well as their college experiences relative to their female counterparts.

## Access to Higher Education

Education research offers overwhelming evidence of the challenges that Latino students face in navigating higher education pathways. Scholars have observed that these challenges stem from lower family income levels and parental education (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Harrell & Forney, 2003; Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004; Sanchez, Marder, Berry, & Ross, 1992), poor academic preparation (Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007), and lack of access to information about the college-going process (McDonough, 1997), among other challenges. Although these challenges are well documented, scholars and practitioners have long argued for the need to investigate these issues using more thoughtful, refined, and disaggregated approaches that are organized along racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender lines. For example, some scholars are focusing on understanding the unique challenges faced by African American male students in accessing higher education (Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Ferguson, 2000).

However, the extant research literature is almost silent on Latino males and their educational pathways into higher education. There are few reliable national data sources that allow for an exhaustive analysis of Latino males, a glaring research need that should be addressed by future iterations of research on this student population. The most consistent sources of national education data available on Latino males are various U.S. Census data tools, and these data are further synthesized in the annual NCES *Digest of Education Statistics*. In addition, data collected through the Freshman Survey of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California, Los Angeles, allow us to examine the myriad factors that facilitate access to 4-year colleges and universities for entering college students. Both NCES and CIRP Freshman Survey data have been collected for several decades, and they afford the added dimension of a longitudinal analysis of national trends for Latino males and their peers.

## Census Data on the College Enrollment and Educational Attainment of Latino Males

In recent years, U.S. Census data on college enrollment and educational attainment show significant differences in success rates between male and female Latino students (Garcia, 2001; Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). In 2005, the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) reported that more than 1.9 million Latino males within the 18 to 34 age group were enrolled in or had finished a post-secondary education, representing 28.1% of all Latino males within this age group.

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of the Latina/o Population Enrolled in any Form of School<sup>a</sup> (by age group)**

Age Group	Latino Males (%)			Latina Females (%)		
	1980	1990	2005	1980	1990	2005
16 & 17 years	81.5	85.5	92.5	82.2	85.3	92.6
18 & 19 years	36.9	40.7	51.8	38.8	47.2	57.2
20 & 21 years	21.4	21.7	25.2	17.6	33.1	35.3
22-24 years	10.7	11.2	17.5	12.6	8.4	21.8
25-29 years	6.8	4.6	5.6	6.9	8.1	10.4
30-34 years	6.2	4.0	2.6	4.1	3.1	6.1

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2007).

<sup>a</sup>School includes enrollment in any type of graded public, parochial, or other private schools. This also includes elementary schools, high schools, colleges, universities, and professional schools.

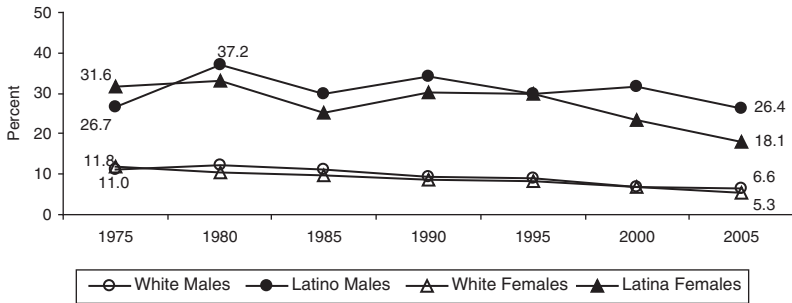
Comparatively, 2.1 million Latina females in the 18 to 34 age group were enrolled in or had finished college, representing 35.4% of all Latina females within that age group. This represents a substantial proportional difference between Latino males and Latina females in college enrollment and educational attainment, and this further highlights why we need to give greater scrutiny to the experiences of Latino males during the early schooling years and throughout their educational pathways.

Table 2 displays Latina/o population enrollment trends in school by age group over the past 25 years, where *school* can extend from secondary to postsecondary institutions. The school enrollment data spotlight the first evidence of a gender gap in the 18 to 19 age cohort, which is right at the cusp of a student's transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

In 2005, 51.8% of 18- to 19-year-old Latino males and 57.2% of 18- to 19-year-old Latina females were still enrolled in some form of schooling. Within the same year's data, the enrollment gender gap increases for the cohort of students who are 20 to 21 years old, which represents a more traditional college-going age group. Moreover, the enrollment gap persists even in the older age cohorts, suggesting that Latina females are more likely to return to college at a nontraditional age or perhaps continue on through graduate and professional school. In either case, the story seems to be that Latino males are lagging behind their female peers at critical points of transition as they move through the higher education pipeline, a finding further highlighted by high school dropout data (see Figure 1a).

The high school dropout issue has been a major source of contention among policy makers and educational practitioners, mostly as a result of the varied metrics that are used to define a dropout as well as the heightened political pressure that such data wield as a result of accountability policies such as the Bush administration's No

**Figure 1a**  
**Percentage of High School Dropouts Among Persons 16 to 24 Years Old by Sex (1975 to 2005)**



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2006).

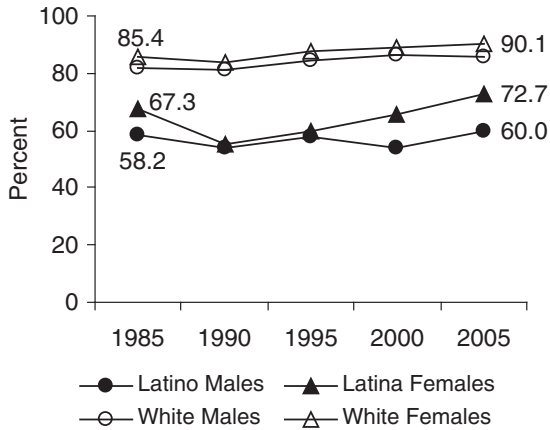
Note: Status dropouts are 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and who have not completed a high school program regardless of when they left school. People who have received GED credentials are counted as high school completers. Data are based on sample surveys of the civilian noninstitutionalized population, which excludes persons in prisons, persons in the military, and other persons not living in households.

Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The *Digest of Education Statistics* employs a “status dropout” counting method that accounts for any student not enrolled in school who has not achieved a high school diploma or its equivalent. Among 16- to 24-year-old Latino males in 2005, the proportion of high school dropouts is 26.4% compared with 18.1% for Latina females, both of which are well above the rates for their White male and female counterparts within this age range.

Latino males within this age group are more than four times more likely than their White male counterparts (6.6%) to be a status dropout, a finding that is perhaps the accumulated outcome of the variety of hypotheses proposed in the first half of this article. One positive finding that can be gleaned from the data is that dropout rates—at least as defined by this metric—appear to be declining over time for both Latino males and Latina females. Since a high point of 37.2% in 1980, the status dropout proportion for Latino males within this age range has been steadily declining at similar rates as other peer groups.

Figures 1b and 1c offer another glimpse at college enrollment trends for Latino males and their peers. In 1985, 58.2% of Latino males within the 18 to 24 age group were high school completers, whereas 14.8% within this age group were enrolled in postsecondary education. These proportions have increased modestly in the past 20 years, up to 60% and 20.7%, respectively. However, the majority of Latinos enrolled

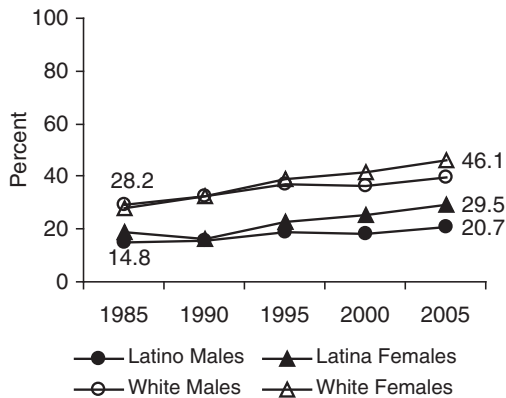
**Figure 1b**  
**High School Completers by Race and Gender (18 to 24 years old)**



Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Note: High school completers are students who have attained a high school diploma or equivalent.

**Figure 1c**  
**College Enrollment by Race and Gender (18 to 24 years old)**



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007).

Note: High school completers are students who have attained a high school diploma or equivalent. Students in the college enrollment category include students who have enrolled in 2-year or 4-year institutions.

in higher education are in the 2-year sector (Cook & Cordova, 2007), so gains in college enrollment need to be considered in this context as well. A closer examination of Latino males in college will be offered in the proceeding section.

It is evident from these data that Latino males are lagging behind their Latina female peers at these critical junctures of college access. The proportions for Latino males are the lowest among the comparison groups portrayed in these figures, lower than White males and females as well as Latina females. As for Latinas, they have shown modest gains in increased high school completion and college enrollment. These findings speak to the vanishing trend faced by Latino males in higher education. Even as the actual numbers and proportions of Latino males have increased, these rates have not kept pace with Latina females.

### College Enrollment Patterns at 2-Year and 4-Year Institutions

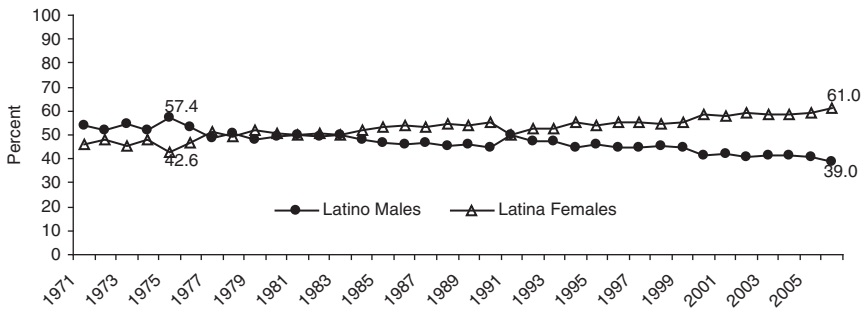
Latino male and Latina female students who enroll in higher education are disproportionately over-enrolling in community colleges while remaining underrepresented in selective 4-year institutions (Arbona & Nora, 2007). In fall 2004, 54.4% of Hispanics enrolled in a postsecondary institution were attending 2-year colleges compared with 36.1% of White and 42.5% of African American students (Cook & Cordova, 2007). As Arbona and Nora (2007) suggest, community colleges are not the preferred gateway to a bachelor's degree, as associate degree attainment rates and transfer rates to 4-year institutions remain problematic for Latinos. When Latinos do start their college education at a 2-year rather than a 4-year institution, their chances for attaining a bachelor's degree are significantly diminished. For Latino students starting at a 2-year institution, less than 35% attain any degree in 6 years, whereas almost 55% of Latino students who start at a 4-year institution attain a degree within the same time span (Excelencia in Education, 2007b).

Turning our attention to college enrollment at 4-year institutions, we used trends data collected through the CIRP Freshman Survey, a national normative data collection effort that has served colleges since the mid-1960s. A special report focused on CIRP Freshman Survey trends for entering Latina/o college students is due to be released in 2008 (Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008). From 1975 to 2006, the CIRP Freshman Survey trends data (see Figure 2) show that the proportion of Latino males entering 4-year institutions—relative to Latina females—declined from 57.4% to 39.0%. Despite these gender differences, it should be noted that college enrollment numbers for Latino males and females have increased during this time span (see Figure 1c), although the rate of increase has obviously been higher for Latina females.

A closer look at the gender gap by Latina/o ethnic categories shows some variation within groups (see Table 3). In disaggregating the Latina/o ethnic groups by gender, the most pronounced gender disparity exists within Mexican American/Chicanos where females outnumber males by a factor approaching 2 to 1 as of 2006. The smallest gender gap exists within Puerto Rican entering college freshmen at 4-year



**Figure 2**  
**Entering Latina/o College Freshmen at 4-Year**  
**Institutions by Sex (1971-2006)**



Source: Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Cabrera (2008).

Note: These figures represent national normative data collected from entering first-time, full-time college freshmen at 4-year institutions.

**Table 3**  
**Enrollment Trends by Gender and Latina/o Ethnic Groups**  
**at 4-Year Institutions**

		1975	1995	2006
All Latinas/os	male	57.4	45.8	39.0
	female	42.6	54.2	61.0
Mexican American/Chicano	male	57.7	46.2	37.1
	female	42.3	53.8	62.9
Puerto Rican	male	58.1	44.6	41.6
	female	41.9	55.4	58.4
Other Latina/o	male	—	46.3	39.6
	female	—	53.7	60.4
White (non-Hispanic)	male	51.6	46.1	44.0
	female	48.4	53.9	56.0

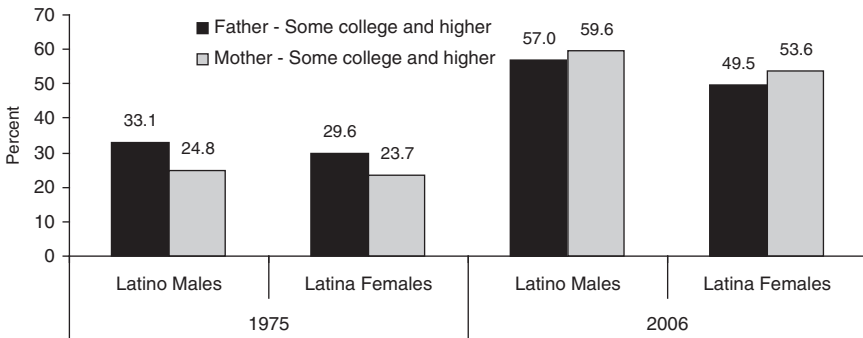
Source: Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Cabrera, (2008).

NOTE: There are no data to report for the Other Latina/o category in 1975 because it was not introduced on the Cooperative Institutional Research Program freshman survey until 1991.

institutions. For White non-Hispanic students, the gender gap trend has continued along a similar path, although the proportional disparity is not as pronounced relative to Latina/o ethnic groups.

Even as the raw number of Latino males in higher education may be increasing, their continuing loss of ground to Latina females at 4-year institutions is increasingly evident. The disaggregated Latina/o ethnic data demonstrate that the gender gap is

**Figure 3**  
**Latinas/os at 4-Year Institutions: Parental Education by Sex**



Source: Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Cabrera (2008).

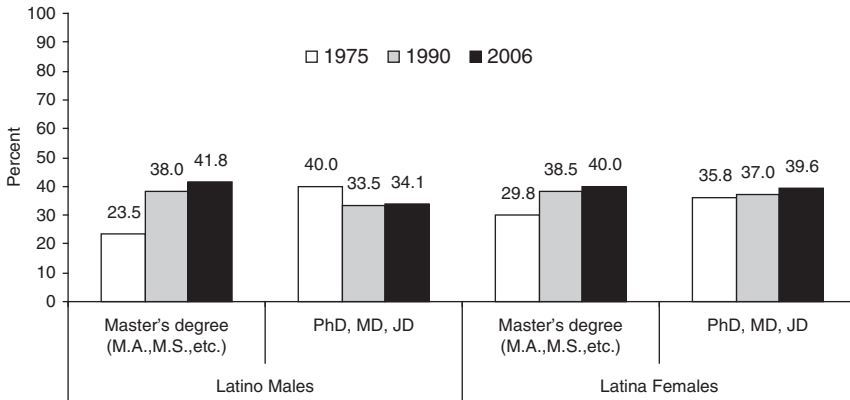
consistent across all groups represented in the CIRP data. Further research is needed to continue to shed light on this pressing—and all too often unacknowledged—crisis in higher education, as all Latina/o ethnic groups are affected.

### Parental Education: CIRP Trends Data

Another demographic indicator that shows a significant disparity is the parental education levels of entering Latina/o college students relative to their peers. A recent report on first-generation college students<sup>2</sup> (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007) found that entering Latina/o freshmen at 4-year institutions are more likely than their peers to report lower levels of educational attainment among their parents, a trend that has held strongly for more than three decades. In fact, Saenz, Hurtado, et al. (2007) noted that although the proportion of first-generation college students has been declining since 1971 across all racial and ethnic groups, the rate of decline has been slowest for Latinas/os, suggesting a growing gap.

In comparing parental education levels for Latino males and Latina females (see Figure 3), it is evident that males are reporting higher overall levels for both parents as compared with females. It is also evident that mothers have eclipsed fathers in terms of the reported education levels, a trend that holds true for parents of both Latino males and Latina females. If we subscribe to the notion that parental education predicts access to enhanced educational opportunities, then the implication for Latinas is that they are successfully overcoming the apparent obstacle of less educated parents and perhaps overachieving relative to their Latino male peers when it comes to college enrollment at 4-year institutions.

**Figure 4**  
**Graduate Degree Aspirations for Entering Latina/o College Students**



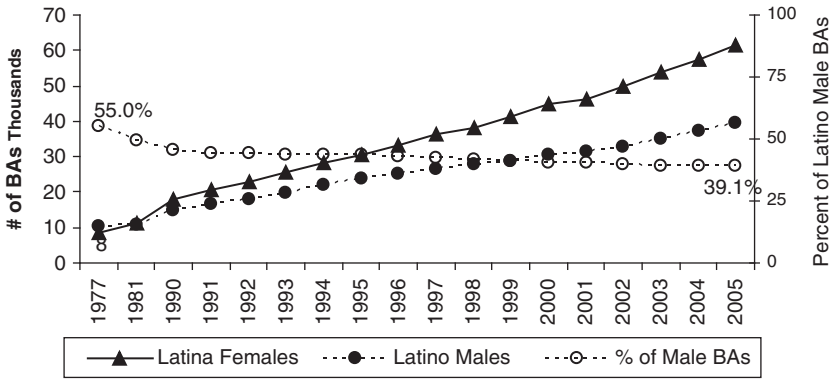
Source: Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Cabrera (2008).

### Degree Aspirations and Degree Attainment

A review of Latina/o degree aspirations at college entry using CIRP trends data reveals another set of interesting clues concerning the growing gap in college enrollment between Latino males and females. Figure 4 displays students' post-baccalaureate degree aspirations across three time points (i.e., 1975, 1990, and 2006). Compelling differences between the two groups arise when comparing graduate degree aspirations (i.e., PhD, MD, and JD, all terminal degrees). With the exception of 1975, Latina females have consistently reported higher degree aspirations among these three categories than their male counterparts, and the gap between them appears to be widening. This phenomenon is not a new one, as higher aspirations among Latina females were also documented by Kuvlesky and Juarez (1975) in their work in the early 1970s. More recent research on this topic provides growing evidence that educational achievement among Latinas serves as a means to strive for equality of status and opportunity (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). The notion here is perhaps that women perceive higher degree credentials as "tickets to a higher status that challenges male domination and offers greater autonomy" (Cammarota, 2004, p. 55).

When we consider this finding alongside Latina females' higher reported self-efficacy rating on other CIRP Freshman Survey items (Hurtado et al., forthcoming), the overall picture is all the more significant in their favor. Strong self-efficacy can indeed manifest itself in positive academic outcomes when such initial predispositions

**Figure 5**  
**Latina/o Bachelor's Degrees Awarded (1977-2005)**



Source: U.S. Department of Education (2005).

are nurtured correctly and consistently. Over time, both groups have continued to exhibit strong degree aspirations, and 4-year colleges should take keen notice of this important trend among their entering Latina/o populations.

Figure 5 highlights exactly how such degree aspirations have borne out over time, as Latina females have eclipsed their Latino male counterparts both in the actual number of BA degrees and in the proportional share awarded. The implications for Latino males are disconcerting yet again. As has been noted throughout, Latino males are lagging behind at every critical juncture of the higher education pipeline. Even after enrolling in a 4-year institution, Latino males struggle to graduate relative to their peer groups. This is an area where further research is certainly warranted, but it has to be carefully structured so as to consider all the other dimensions of accumulated social, cultural, and structural challenges that accompany Latino males along their educational pathways.

The question of why Latino males have more difficulty navigating college as compared with their female counterparts needs to be further examined empirically. Part of the challenge is that there is a scarcity of research that focuses specifically on the Latino male college experience, and most of what we know about Latino males in college is indirectly ascertained from the important scholarship that examines the Latina educational condition in postsecondary education.

A recent study by Gloria, Castellanos, and Orozco (2005) highlighted the important factors that lead to the academic success of Latina college students. The authors of the study, which examined how students' perception of educational barriers and cultural fit influenced their well-being in college, found that Latinas were highly

motivated and employed active coping strategies to overcome a variety of social, cultural, and educational challenges that ultimately reaffirmed their academic success. Similarly, Barajas and Pierce (2001) found that young Latinas navigate successfully through high school and college by sustaining a positive self-image of themselves as well as their ethnic identity and group membership as Latinas. Furthermore, the authors noted that this positive self-image was nurtured through formal and informal networks and relationships with other Latina peers throughout high school and college, something that may be a missing link for the Latino male experience.

As for Latino males, Barajas and Pierce (2001) note that although they do see themselves as part of a larger Latino cultural group, they tend to have less positive notions of cultural identity than their Latina peers. Also, the authors note that Latino males are not inclined to have the same agency with respect to tapping into networks and relationships that can help sustain a positive outlook throughout their college pathway. Along these lines, Figueroa (2002) found that Latino males in college are more prone to achieve academically and graduate when they uncover responsive social networks within the college environment that are nurturing and help them persevere in spite of feeling unwelcome and alienated. Although this article has attempted to diagnose the symptoms of why Latino males are vanishing in higher education, further efforts are necessary to uncover the ways in which the college environment serves to nurture or discourage Latino male success.

Beyond such a discussion, these trends also portend a very different and challenging question concerning Latino males: If they are not going to college, then what are their possible alternative career pathways? In the following section, we begin to shed light on the complex portrait of alternative career pathways for Latino males. We take a closer examination of Latino male participation rates in three distinct areas: occupational fields, the military, and other areas (unemployment, prison, etc.).

## **Workforce Patterns**

### **Where Do Latino Males Go if Not to College? Alternative Career Pathways**

Latinos have historically had among the highest participation rates in the U.S. labor force, but they tend to work in jobs that pay low wages, provide low economic mobility, provide little or no health insurance, are less stable, and are more hazardous to their health (Maldonado & Farmer, 2006). This can result from low educational attainment, decreased English language proficiency, and lack of work experience, training, and/or other employability skills ("Deadly Trend," 2002). Even though Latinos tend to enter the workforce at an early age, being tracked into low-skill jobs decreases the opportunities to gain work experiences that could lead to an upwardly mobile career track, better pay, and lower risk occupations (Maldonado &

**Table 4**  
**Employment Status of the Civilian Non-institutional**  
**Population by Race/Ethnicity**

		A. Civilian Non-institutional population (in 1000s)	% of full-time workers within A	B. Civilian Workforce (in 1000s)	% of Civilian workforce within A	% of full-time workers within B
Hispanic/Latino (16 to 24 years)	Men	3432	45.5	2,246	65.4	69.5
	Women	3159	26.0	1,572	49.8	52.2
White (16 to 24 years)	Men	14,766	38.4	9,511	64.4	59.6
	Women	14,222	27.8	8,460	59.5	46.8
African American (16-24 years)	Men	2,685	26.5	1,367	50.9	52.0
	Women	2,847	24.1	1,409	49.5	48.7
Total (16-24 years)	Men	18,909	35.9	11,636	61.5	58.4
	Women	18,501	26.9	10,582	57.2	47.1

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007).

Farmer, 2006). High labor force participation rates also hold true for college-age Latinos, especially for Latino males (see Table 4).

According to 2007 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost half (45.5%) of the 3.4 million Latino males between the ages of 16 and 24 are employed full-time, compared with about a quarter (26.0%) of their Latina counterparts. Latino males are about 10 percentage points above the national average for all males within this age range (35.9%). Moreover, within the population that is counted among the civilian workforce, more than two thirds (69.5%) of Latino males are full-time employed compared with slightly more than half (52.2%) of Latinas. The fact that such a high proportion of Latino males report full-time employment suggests that they are entering the workforce at an earlier age than their counterparts. It further suggests that they may have already chosen to forgo the opportunity to pursue higher education for the time being. Also, the vastly lower proportion of Latina females who are engaged in the civilian workforce suggests that they may be pursuing post-secondary opportunities at greater rates than their male counterparts, a hypothesis that is validated by college enrollment and educational attainment trends.

Workforce data also provide important insights into the alternative career pathways of college-age Latino males. Simply stated, the workforce participation patterns for Latino males paint a far different picture as compared with the broader U.S. population. For example, in the recent 2006 *American Community Survey* (ACS; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006a), Latino male workers have a lower representation in management, professional, and related occupations (13.7%) compared with the general population (31.0%), occupations that tend to require a postsecondary education (see Table 5). Similarly, Latino males represent a lower proportion of white-collar

**Table 5**  
**2006 American Community Survey Employment Occupations for Males**

Occupation	Males—General Population, 16 years and older (75, 678,55)	Males—Latinos, 16 years and older (11,580,878)	Percentage Difference
Management, professional Service	31.0	13.7	-17.3
Sales and office	13.4	19.6	6.2
Farming, fishing, and forestry	17.9	14.1	-3.8
Construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair	1.1	3.0	1.9
Production, transportation, and material moving	18.0	26.8	8.8
	18.6	22.8	4.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2006a).

NOTE: Data based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability.

positions in sales and office occupations compared with the general U.S. population (14.1% and 17.9%, respectively). Conversely, Latino males occupy blue-collar employment positions (i.e., work positions that require manual labor) in greater proportions compared with the general population. For instance, 26.8% of the Latino male workforce (age 16 and older) occupy positions in construction, maintenance, or repair compared with 18.0% of the general population of males in the workforce.

Lower skilled occupations translate into lower overall median salaries for Latino males as compared with the general population of males. According to the 2006 ACS, the median earnings of full-time, year-round Latino male workers were \$27,490 compared with a median of \$42,210 for the general population of males. This earnings gap—representing a proportional difference of 53.5%—reflects an enormous wage disparity that reveals the effects of limited workforce opportunities for Latino males.

These employment and occupation statistics highlight a sobering trend for Latino males in the U.S. workforce. In a 2003 National Council of La Raza report (Thomas-Breitfeld, 2003), researchers found that Latinos are much more likely than non-Latinos to be unemployed and be represented among low-skilled occupations. In 2003, 8.4% of Latinos (e.g., males and females) were unemployed compared with 5% of non-Hispanic Whites (Thomas-Breitfeld, 2003). According to the 2006 ACS, Latino males were more likely to work in service occupations and as laborers than their White counterparts. These lower skilled employment positions correlate strongly with earnings and lead to a significant number of Latinos living below the poverty line. That is, Latinos are less likely to earn annual incomes of \$35,000 or more (i.e., 26% versus 54%) and they are more likely to live below the poverty line (i.e., 21% versus 8%).

## Unemployment Trends for Latino Males

The unemployment rates of Latino males also suggest that some have inconsistent work histories. It is critical to understand the unemployment status of Latino males because it represents another perspective of their employment patterns. Researchers reported in the 2007 Bureau of Labor Statistics that the jobless rate for Latinos has been consistently higher than non-Hispanic Whites from 1970 to the present. However, in recent years, the unemployment rate for Latinos as a whole has reached historic lows, to 5.2% in 2006 (Kochhar, 2006). The unemployment rate for Latinos varies for native- and foreign-born populations, and it is higher for females than for males (Passel, 2006). The unemployment rate in 2006 for native-born Latinos who have not attended college was about 7%, compared with 4.2% for foreign-born Latinos (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). This disparity between native- and foreign-born Latinos may be attributed to the greater volume of Latino immigrants who take advantage of the growing construction industry, which has a 90% Latino male workforce (Kochhar, 2006).

These trends related to employment patterns and unemployment rates underscore the critical relationship between employment and educational attainment, which may suggest that the level of education attained by Latino males often dictates the types of employment they occupy. The relationship between educational attainment and workforce opportunities raises additional concerns because of Latino population trends. In a recent U.S. Census Bureau (2006b) report, researchers note that between 2000 and 2006, Latinos accounted for one half of the nation's growth, and their growth rate, 24%, was more than four times the growth rate of the total U.S. population, 6%. This dramatic increase highlights that the fastest growing demographic group is also most likely to occupy manual labor worker positions (e.g., service, construction, maintenance, repair, etc.) and have lower educational attainment levels beyond high school.

## Undocumented Workers

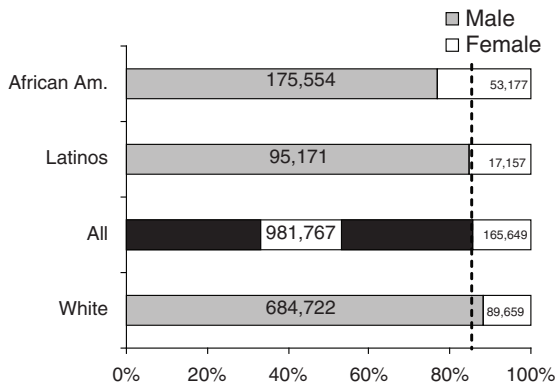
Latinos make up the majority of the foreign-born workforce population, with a significant number categorized as unauthorized workers, or undocumented immigrants (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007; Passel, 2006). Within the labor workforce, Latinos are concentrated in nonprofessional service occupations, which rank low in potential earnings and educational requirements and are less conducive for upward social mobility (Kochhar, 2005). These undocumented persons are highly concentrated in the construction industry, the vast majority of whom are Latino males (Kochhar, 2005).

For immigrant Latinos, the expectations to work, contribute to the family, and assume a traditional gender role often supersede their desire to attain a higher education. Fry (2005) notes that foreign-born school dropout rates are strongly linked to the age at which the teen migrates and the country that initially educated the teen. Foreign-born teens who arrive in the United States early in their childhood have a better chance of matriculating through the education system; however, teens who



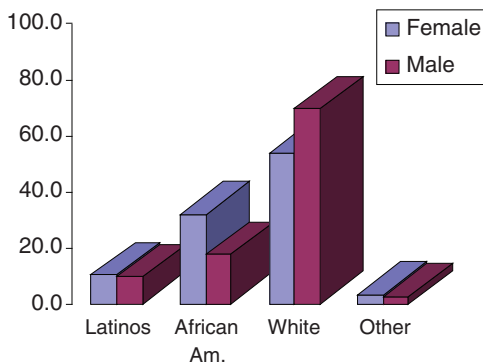
arrive in late adolescence or who had education difficulties before immigrating have a high school dropout rate greater than 70% (Fry, 2005). The pressure to work once arriving in this country is even more urgent for this population of males (Fry, 2005). Many foreign-born Latino males who arrive in late adolescence are likely to be labor migrants. In effect, they come to the United States to work and not to attend college (Fry, 2005).

**Figure 6a**  
**Active Enlisted by Gender and Racial/Ethnic Group, 2005**



Source: U.S. Department of Defense (2005).

**Figure 6b**  
**Active Enlisted: Distribution of Race/Ethnicity by Gender**



Source: U.S. Department of Defense (2005).

## Latino Males in the Military

Latino males make up approximately 9.8% of the total enlisted military persons within the Department of Defense, which includes all the armed forces and the Coast Guard (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005). It should be noted that not all Latino males are eligible to serve in the military. In particular, the high rates of high school dropouts and nonpermanent immigration status of many Latinos make them ineligible to serve. In examining the enlistment rates by gender, it is clear that Latino males represent a large proportion of all Latinas/os in the military. Figures 6a and 6b highlight these trends across gender and racial/ethnic lines. In Figure 6a, we note that Latino males are on par with the overall proportion of enlisted males relative to females. Figure 6b offers more insight into the distribution of racial/ethnic groups within each gender, and Latino males and females each represent about 10% of their respective gender group.

A closer examination of the military appointments of Latino males indicates that they are still underrepresented in the military in comparison with the dramatic growth of the Latino population projected for the next 40 years. According to the U.S. Department of Defense (2003) service report, researchers found that Latinos were still underrepresented in military officer appointments in comparison with the civilian group. One possible explanation for the disparity in actual Latino male representation in the military enlisted ranks is educational attainment level. That is, because 99% of the enlisted military members had earned a high school diploma or equivalent and Latino males have lower overall educational attainment levels, they are less likely to pursue a career in the military and hold military officer appointments.

## Latino Males in Prison

Latino males also have a significant presence in the prison system. Although the rates of Latino males entering the judicial system remain lower than that of Black males, they are approximately four times more likely than White males to be admitted to prison during their lifetime (Bonczar & Beck, 1997). In a recent report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Bonczar, 2003), it was reported that unchanging incarceration rates yield a prediction for 1 in 6 of Latino males to go to prison during their lifetime, versus a prediction of 1 in 17 for White males. In 2005, Latinos made up 15% of the jail population, with an estimated 3.7% of all Latino males in their 20s incarcerated (Harrison & Beck, 2006). Although these numbers are significant, the actual number of Latinos incarcerated may be higher than what is accounted for by reporting agencies due to the inconsistency in correctly identifying Latino males. Researchers have argued that not all agencies recognize Latinos as a distinct group and they are frequently counted by race demographics such as White or Black (*Hispanic Prisoners in the United States*, 2003).

Within the context of college-age Latino males, a recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau (2006a) found that the ratio of Latino males in jail dormitories to Latino males in college dormitories is 2.7 to 1. Such statistics are more hyperbole than reality, as there are certainly more Latino males in the higher education pipeline than there are in American prisons. Recently, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2006) found that more than 269,000 Latino males between the ages of 18 and 34 were in local, state, and federal prisons (compared with more than 1.9 million who were enrolled in a postsecondary institution or had finished a postsecondary education).

Nonetheless, these rates of incarceration are still problematic. First, it begs the question, why are they going to prison and for what crimes? For example, although there is no meaningful difference in rates of drug use between Whites and people of color, there are dramatic differences in rates of arrest, prosecution, and conviction for drug-related offenses along racial lines (Brown et al., 2003). In addition, there are differential mandatory sentences for similar crimes (e.g., the difference in sentences between a crack-related offense and a cocaine-related offense). This is not meant to condone antisocial behavior such as the distribution and usage of illegal narcotics. However, if Latinos are imprisoned and Whites are not imprisoned for similar behaviors, this adversely affects the human capital of the Latino community. It steers Latinos away from the possibility of college and moving into the skilled labor sector of the population. This is additionally problematic given the difficulty for once incarcerated people to reenter the workforce once they have been marked with a criminal conviction on their record (Prager, 2007).

## Promising Practices

We have presented a rather sobering picture of the status of Latino males in higher education. Despite the many challenges we have explored, there are some efforts being made at different organizational levels that attempt to assuage the declining trend of Latino male participation in higher education. A review of the extant program initiatives indicates that there are meaningful efforts under way by public and private organizations to address the low enrollment rates of these under-represented individuals. The intent of this review is not to highlight the empirical efficacy or proven track record of these programs but, rather, to offer a set of ideas for programmatic models that have been employed to some success. In particular, we will provide a brief overview of the initiatives in three key transition points throughout the educational career of Latino males: K-12 outreach programs, postsecondary outreach programs, and private sector initiatives. Each of these areas represents a multipronged intervention approach to this complex social issue. The concerted efforts of all these outreach programs require the participation of the educational institutions; local, state, and federal governments; and the private sector. Therefore, we will briefly highlight how some programs use pragmatic approaches to tackle this educational crisis facing Latino males.

## **K-12 Outreach Programs**

### *Boys Project*

A promising outreach project called the Boys Project highlights 2000 U.S. Census data that illustrate the overall educational crisis facing boys in our educational systems. They reported that for every 100 girls enrolled in kindergarten, there are 116 boys enrolled, and for every 100 girls enrolled in high school, there are 100 boys enrolled, yet for every 100 women enrolled in college, there are 77 men enrolled. To reverse those trends, the organization has the following three objectives:

1. Showcase colleges, schools, teachers, and organizations that have succeeded in engaging young men, increasing their academic success, and developing drive and ambition.
2. Educate families, educators, and the public about the challenges our young boys are facing.
3. Develop federal, state, and foundation initiatives that support relevant research and necessary legislative change.

Although this program does not specifically focus on Latino males, it provides a wealth of information with regard to the education of young boys in the educational system. For example, it provides various resources that address current educational issues related to young boys. Some of these resources highlight key recommendations such as single-sex schools, additional elementary male teachers, and revamping the school curriculum (see <http://www.boysproject.net/resources.html>).

There is an emerging body of research on single-sex education that overwhelmingly reports positive effects for boys when attending all-male schools. Historically, the issue of single-sex education has been posed in terms of creating conditions where the needs of female students could be addressed. Now, the enhanced understanding of the gender specificity of developmental patterns is being employed to explain beneficial effects found in all-male schooling environments (Riordan, 2002).

### *Puente Project*

Other programs address the transition of Latino males to higher education. For example, the Puente Project is a program specifically designed to “increase the number of educationally underserved students who enroll in four year colleges and universities, earn degrees, and return to the community as leaders and mentors for future generations” (see <http://www.puente.net/>). The Puente Project is cosponsored by the University of California and California Community Colleges, with additional funding provided by private foundations such as the Ford Foundation. Although not focused solely on Latino males, the Puente Project provides a strong programmatic model that has been empirically proven to help facilitate the college pathways for underrepresented students in California.

*XY-Zone*

Similar to the Puente Project, the XY-Zone outreach program was designed to help at-risk young men in local Austin, Texas, high schools through their educational career pathways. This organization relies on staff members to actively seek out students in high school to help them navigate the challenges associated with school issues, healthy personal relationships, and their academic futures. This program relies on partnerships with local and federal grant dollars to deliver this intensive outreach program. Similar to other K-12 educational programs, this program offers a small-scale approach to an educational problem that is approaching epidemic levels.

Although these K-12 programs offer compelling evidence of student success, they also highlight that a piecemeal approach may not sufficiently resolve this issue. These outreach programs need to be coordinated with a larger network of programs that have similar objectives. In the next section, we highlight a few postsecondary initiatives that attempt to recruit and retain underrepresented students and, in particular, Latino males.

## **Postsecondary Outreach Programs**

Other educational programs exist in postsecondary settings and are primarily focused on recruiting and retaining underrepresented males in higher education. Some of these outreach programs are student organizations, institutional programs, and broader systemwide programs. These programs illustrate how some higher education students, administrators, and faculty attempt to recruit and retain Latino males in higher education.

*La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Incorporated*

In 1982, students at Cornell University started one of the first male service fraternity specifically for Latino males. These undergraduate students created this student organization to improve the educational experience of its Latino undergraduate members. With a list of more than 70 chapters, they envisioned that this organization would “take a leadership role in meeting the needs of the Latino community through cultural awareness, community service, and promotion of the Latino culture and people” (see <http://www.launidadlatina.org/>). This fraternity, along with Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity, Inc. started at Kean College (NJ), are filling a need for Latino males in higher education.

*Institutional-Level Outreach Programs*

Institutions across the country have developed various programs specifically designed to address the underrepresentation of African American males. Institutions like the University of Georgia (Gentlemen on the Move; African American males),

Georgia Tech (Focus Program), Morehouse College (Pre-Freshman summer program), George Mason University (Early Identification program), and St. Petersburg College (Brother to Brother) provide some institutional models that could be adapted to fit the needs of Latino males.

Other Hispanic Serving Institutions have created programs to address the recruitment and retention of Latino students. Many of these federally funded programs were developed to address the intersection of race and poverty. For example, Coastal Bend College in conjunction with the University of Houston–Victoria developed the “Improving Hispanic Attainment in South Texas: Building Community Among the High School, the Community College and the University” program to improve the educational pipeline for low-income and traditionally underrepresented Latino students. The University of New Mexico developed two programs (Faculty/Staff Development and Engagement, and Student Development and Engagement) to improve the campus climate for Latino students.

### **Federally Funded Outreach Programs**

Among the most recognized programs in higher education directly geared to improving access and accessibility to a postsecondary education are the venerable TRIO outreach programs. These programs, Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services, emanated from early federal Higher Education Acts to provide opportunities for low-income and underrepresented students to gain greater access and support to complete a college education. These TRIO programs, based on their legacy and outreach, have been an essential tool in providing access for underrepresented students. In a 2004 Upward Bound federal report, approximately 45% of African American, 25% of White, and 19% of Latino students represented the eligible Upward Bound participants (Cahalan & Curtin, 2004).

### **Private Sector Outreach Programs**

Another promising practice in reversing the trend of low Latino male participation rates in higher education is the continued interest and support of educational programs by private sector foundations and companies. These private sector outreach programs show a strong commitment from these organizations to support the educational pathways of aspiring Latino male high school and undergraduate students.

#### *Intercultural Development Research Association Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program*

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a research-based and internationally recognized dropout prevention program administered by the Intercultural Development Research

Association. The program targets secondary students who are considered to be at risk of dropping out of school and who are, in turn, placed as tutors of elementary students, enabling them to engage younger students as well as reinforce their own learning. The program has proven to be most successful in enabling these tutors to graduate from high school and enroll in college, students who would otherwise be headed toward dropping out. Again, although the program does not explicitly target Latino male students, the efficacy of this mentoring program may serve as a model for other programmatic interventions.

#### *The Sallie Mae Foundation*

The Sallie Mae foundation sponsored the first national Latino College Dollars Scholarship directory. This initiative provides valuable financial aid information to Latino families. The new directory—made possible with grants from The Sallie Mae Fund, The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation, and The Walt Disney Company—follows recommendations from a Tomás Rivera Policy Institute study that showed that Latino students and their families often are misinformed or unaware of scholarship opportunities (see <http://www.thesalliemae.org>).

#### *Hispanic Heritage Foundation*

The Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF) “identifies, inspires, promotes and prepares Latino role models through national leadership, cultural, educational and workforce programs” (see <http://www.hispanicheritage.org/index.php>). Along with other corporate sponsors, this organization provides scholarships and workforce programs to improve the lives of Latino youth. In a recent report conducted by a joint venture with HHF and the National Research Center for Colleges and University Admissions, they surveyed more than 5.5 million students and created a subsample of 50,000 Hispanic high school students about their interest in STEM majors (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math). They found that there is a growing trend over the past 6 years (i.e., 2003-2010) among Hispanic students to pursue a higher education major in STEM fields. This type of empirical evidence in support of Latino educational issues undergirds the importance of partnerships between foundations and the private sector.

## **Future Directions for Policy, Practice, and Research**

Although outreach and intervention programs provide a useful benefit, they are designed to help many Latino males who would otherwise not have the insight, support, or necessary social networks to succeed on their academic pathways. However, we also must recognize that these programs raise additional concerns and thoughts that deserve some discussion. In particular, we believe that beyond these programs, there are other factors that are part of the solution to this complex social problem. There is a need, for example, to better understand male learning styles and interaction, especially in the early grade levels. At each educational level, do males

have special learning needs? If so, how can they be met? What about the effects of nutrition and exercise on Latino male academic achievement in the early grade levels, an area where little or no significant research exists? How can we think more critically and carefully about the various cultural and peer influences that seem to confound Latino male students' aspirations for college enrollment? Can we learn anything from the previous focus on Latina females as they successfully navigate college pathways? Further research needs to explore whether information on boys' learning styles is filtering into school pedagogy, and with what results. Here, we address three additional factors that we believe are germane to helping Latino males succeed and that have implications for policy, practice, and research: the role of Latino families and communities, the importance of Latino male leaders as mentors, and the need to raise awareness of this complex issue at all levels of our society.

The Latino family has a rich cultural tradition as illustrated by family bonds and nurturing social networks, yet it is time for the Latino family to refocus its energies on Latino males. Latino families and communities need to unite and provide the social networks that can inspire, support, and provide direction and vision to the next generation of Latino males. It takes a Latino community of families to redress this issue in order to provide the necessary groundswell to improve the educational pathways of this neglected family member. Existing research on Latina females has established meaningful foundations that can be used to inspire a research agenda focused on the educational experiences of Latino males.

The leadership of successful Latino male adults is needed to make a difference in the lives of Latino males. Successful Latino males in the private sector, in education, and in the local community need to reach back and support the next generation of Latino males. We believe that Latino male leaders can be the most powerful image for young Latinos to embrace as role models. It is the responsibility of the Latino male leadership to recognize that they need to "pay it forward" for the Latino youth so that they can begin to believe that their future is not limited by their perception but rather by the encouragement and positive role model behaviors of their Latino male mentors. The implications for policy are especially salient in this area, as this is an area where schools, communities, and local and state governments could quickly and efficiently become more involved.

Finally, it is essential to recognize and acknowledge that we can no longer remain silent about this growing epidemic. We believe that for Latino males to succeed in the varied academic pathways, researchers, policy makers, public officials, private sector leaders, and Latino families and communities have to embrace this social justice agenda. The sobering statistics are a clarion call for proactive action. We are compelled to raise awareness of this issue at all levels of education, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce development. There is a pressing need to address this issue because Latino males represent an untapped resource in our intellectual marketplace. We need to illuminate the importance of educational policies that assist and support Latino males in the educational system.



## Notes

1. This article uses the words *Latino* and *Hispanic* interchangeably. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Whites and African Americans refer to non-Hispanics.

2. Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, and Yeung (2007) defined first-generation college students as students whose parents have had no college or postsecondary experiences.

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