

# **All the Losers Go There: Challenging the Deficit Educational Discourse of Chicano Racialized Masculinity in a Continuation High School**

**By María C. Malagón**

I ask these unsettling questions: what does it mean for me to write as a Chicano in the final years of the millennium, 506 years after the full-scale invasion of the Americas—the usurpation of lands, the wholesale rape and slaughter of indigenous peoples, the forced importation and brutal enslavement of African peoples; and the institutionalized criminalization and marginalization of the Chicana/o community, etc.?

—Aldama. *Millennial Anxieties: Borders, Violence, and the Struggle for Chicana/o Subjectivity* (1998)

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## **Introduction**

Aldama renders important questions that critical scholars must grapple with as they engage in challenging the deficit accounts that have distorted and/or erased the

experiences of Students of Color. Chicanas/os, who for the purpose of this article are defined as people of Mexican descent living in the United States, carry with them a history of not only a physical colonization but also the lasting imprint of an intellectual apparatus of representation that reifies their status as inferior. Today, even 500 years after the initial invasion of the Americas resulting in the subjugation of indigenous peoples, we cannot come to fully understand the complexity of the continued marginalization of the Chicana/o community without acknowledging the lasting effects of colonization and the permanence of white supremacy. In regards to the Chicana/o community, Aldama argues that we must recognize that there are four negative constants facing this population:

- (1) Continued economic marginalization;
- (2) Sub-standard housing, schooling, and general public services;
- (3) Extremely high incarceration rates, and
- (4) An increase in the sophistication and deployment of violence especially towards Chicana/o youth and Mexican immigrants.

These constants are critical in understanding the various factors that work against young Chicana/o students. Given the importance placed on educational attainment as an avenue for economic and social mobility, it is important to understand and acknowledge how these combined constants allows for a more critical frame that contextualizes how schooling institutions replicate sub-standard conditions and opportunities for Chicano youth.

This article locates the Chicano racialized male body within the education discourse surrounding research and practice. In order to more appropriately understand the experiences of these youth, I draw from critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) in education as well as Chicana feminist epistemologies to more specifically examine the racialized and gendered experiences of Chicano male students. A critical examination that interrogates Eurocentric epistemologies works at deconstructing the racialized and gendered discourses inscribed upon these young bodies. In order to illuminate these experiences, I draw from participatory research and extensive oral history interviews that examine the educational trajectories of Chicano male high school students in a California continuation high school. I place these narratives within a historical context that takes into consideration the pathological marginalization of these Students of Color.

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### **The Need to Examine Chicano Males in Continuation High Schools**

The overall educational attainment of males, specifically pertaining to Chicanos and Latinos, has become of increasing concern in the past decade (Kleinfeld, 1998; Ginorio and Huston, 2001; Lopez, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). According to Kleinfeld, male Students of Color lag far behind their female counterparts. These students are more apt to believe that the school climate is hostile towards them, that teachers do not expect as much from them, and that they are

given less encouragement to do their best. Current research on Latino boys reveals consistent results in terms of how they in general have lower interest in studying, low educational goals and a less optimistic outlook towards their future (Lopez, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Gibson (1993) found that in general, male Students of Color are more likely to perceive racism from mainstream society. These youth are more pressured to develop an “oppositional relationship” with the educational system or to see schooling as a threat to their identity. In regard to school relations, Latino boys’ school based relationships are found to be less supportive compared to girls (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Latino boys are consistently more likely than girls to report they have no one to turn to for specific functions, such as homework help (Suarez-Orozco & Qin 2004). Boys are also more likely to be viewed by school personnel as “threatening” and potential “problem students” (Kleinfeld, 1998; Gibson, 1997; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Lopez 2003). Latino boys are much more likely to be suspended than girls (10% compared to 4%) according to national data (Ginorio & Huston 2001). While dominant literature on Latino males has been student-centered, positing low educational attainment as a result of the student’s background, behavior, and attitudes towards schooling, the researchers mentioned above contend that more research is needed in the area that examines roles that institutions play in reproducing these educational outcomes. In addition, the increasing enrollment numbers of Chicano high school students in alternative education programs such as continuation high schools are largely left unaddressed.

The experiences of Chicano males in continuation high schools becomes of increasing concern as the number of continuation high schools has drastically increased in the last thirty years. In 1965, only 13 continuation high schools existed in California (Kelly, 1993). Currently, 521 continuation high school programs operate within the state (California Department of Education, 2008). While Chicana/o and Latina/o students made up 45% of total California high school students for the 2007-2008 academic year, they constitute the majority of students (56%) enrolled in a California continuation education program. Kelly argues that as school districts seek to mask the dropout/pushout rates at comprehensive high schools, continuation high schools have become a way to strategically “warehouse” students where they are blamed for their educational “failure.”

Continuation programs historically exist within a national movement that attempted to address the increasing concerns over the “problems” associated with working class and immigrant students. Kelly posits continuation programs as “the stepchild” of California secondary schools highlighting the pedagogical and curricular limitations of these institutions. The limited amount of scholarship that examines the experiences of Chicana/o continuation students is mostly understood through frameworks that label these students as “at risk” (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Trembath, Wiest, & Wong, 1998; Unger, 2001; Voss, 1968). The existing research that associates “minority status” with “at-risk” student behavior requires further examination especially because this work fails to critically address the connection

between the large enrollments of Students of Color in continuation high schools. Studies that focus on Chicano males in particular are unable to fully encapsulate the specific educational practices that can help researchers and practitioners comprehensively understand the low educational attainment of this population of students. In the next section, I provide an overview of CRT and LatCrit in order to more appropriately frame an understanding of the exploitative and contradictory relationship between the racialized and gendered constructions of Chicano males and their educational positioning within schooling institutions.

### **CRT and LatCrit in Education**

Considering the efforts made during the civil rights struggle to guarantee socioeconomic, educational and racial equity, U.S. society continues to deal with the problems of racism that persist even as we enter the twenty-first century. Racial inequity continues to reproduce and maintain an unjust system masked by the ideology that protects white<sup>1</sup> supremacy and privilege reiterated by the rhetoric of “meritocracy,” “democracy,” and “equality” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This ideology reinforces the myth that we live in a color-blind society where racism is no longer considered a structural issue. CRT has as a result, emerged as a theoretical framework that aims at deconstructing these racist premises.

CRT offers an appropriate lens for qualitative research in the field of education. I situate my work within this framework to draw from the premise that so-called race neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial subordination. Understanding race is necessary in examining the manner in which racism marginalizes Students of Color, and in this particular case, Chicano students. Haney Lopez (2000) defines race as “a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements, of their morphology and/or ancestry” (p.165). According to Haney Lopez, courts in the United States have historically been engaged in defining the boundaries of racial categories.

The social construction of race is deeply embedded into the social fabric of American life (Haney Lopez 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Race becomes a powerful tool that affects daily life in which interpretive codes and meanings are constructed and operated. Omi and Winant (1994) and Bonilla-Silva (2001) examine how racial meanings become socially contested in arenas where competition for power and distribution of resources define hierarchy and superiority of one race over another. Racial formation must be understood in order to comprehend the social construction of race and how these hierarchies are embedded within social institutions such as the legal system and education.

Racial hierarchies become legitimized through racist ideologies. Solórzano (1998) identifies three important characteristics of racism: (1) the belief that one group is superior, (2) that this “superior” group has the power to carry out racist acts, and (3) that various racial/ethnic groups are affected. In the United States, *white supremacy* operates as a hierarchy of racial domination and exploitation. Power

and resources are unequally distributed to privilege whites and oppress People of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Roediger, 1999). CRT emerges as an invaluable tool for critical scholars who seek to expose and disrupt oppressive conditions within institutions in the U.S. Summarizing the scholarship in this area, CRT in Education can be defined as follows:

CRT in Education draws from multiple disciplines to challenge white supremacy, which shapes the way research specifically, and society generally, understands the educational experiences, conditions and outcomes of People of Color. CRT builds from the knowledge of communities themselves to reveal the ways race, class, gender and other forms of subordination interact to mediate the educational trajectories of those affected by such oppression. CRT is committed to deconstructing these oppressive conditions and empowering Communities of Color to work towards social and racial justice. (Velez, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Solórzano, forthcoming)

LatCrit builds from CRT to add important dimensions instrumental for understanding the racialized/classed/gendered/sexed experiences of Latinas and Latinos (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Adding to the work of CRT, LatCrit addresses issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity and phenotypes. As Delgado Bernal (2002) notes, LatCrit is “conceived as an anti-subordination and anti-essentialist project” (p.108). Together, CRT and LatCrit offer an interdisciplinary approach that can help critical scholars and educators understand and improve the educational experiences of Students of Color. In the following section I draw from Chicana feminist conceptualizations that can further inform a CRT and LatCrit in education when applied to describe the experiences of Chicano male students as they access, persist, address and resist schooling.

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## Chicana Feminist Epistemologies in Education

Lopez (2003) argues the need for education researchers to include a “race-gender experience framework” that allows scholars to examine how raced-gendered experiences shape youths’ educational conditions and outcomes. Delgado Bernal (2002) explains that:

There is not just one raced-gendered epistemology but many that each speak to culturally specific ways of positioning between a raced epistemology that omits the influence of gender on knowledge production and a White feminist epistemology that does not account for race. (p. 107)

I argue that Chicana feminist epistemological frameworks are appropriate to examine the raced/gendered constructions of Chicano male youth in schools. Chicana feminist epistemological frameworks are relatively new to the field of education research and scholarship (Delgado Bernal, 1998). As Chicanas have increased their presence in the academic field of education, these scholars have drawn from the existing work of Chicana feminists to question notions of objectivity and knowledge production. These epistemologies, grounded in the life experiences of Chicanas, include how

researchers use their experiential knowledge to interpret, document, and analyze the lives of their participants from their unique viewpoints.

Chicana feminist epistemologies acknowledge that Chicanas/os inherit a legacy of two colonial projects: the Spanish Conquest that occurred during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the result of early U.S. territorial imperial expansion that ended with the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848) (Anzaldúa, 1987; Perez, 1999; Perez-Torres, 2006). The imprints of both conquests carry forward an ideological apparatus that is inscribed upon what is referred to as the mestiza/o body. As Delgado Bernal (2006) describes, a mestiza [or mestizo] is “literally a woman [or man] of mixed ancestry, especially of Native American, European, and African backgrounds” (p. 116). Chicana feminist epistemologies specifically interrogate the Western/Eurocentric philosophical tenants that fragment the mind from the body, splintering racialized/gendered/sexed identities for the purpose of reducing the mestiza/o body to manageable objects designed for colonialist/capitalist desire (Aldama, 1998; Cruz, 2006). A Chicana feminist critique of Western/Eurocentric epistemological models that preserve white supremacy, examines colonialism as a project that has created racial hierarchies for the purposes of exploitation. Here is where this epistemological standpoint is congruent with and can further inform a CRT/LatCrit framework in education to interrogate the specific educational discourse and practice that affects Chicano males in schooling institutions.

A Chicana feminist epistemology is in a deliberate search of mending a colonized body complete (Cruz, 2006). Cruz begins to ask questions such as “how does a regime of a given society become inscribed onto the bodies of our youth?” (p. 50). The mestiza/o body serves as a discursive site that can interrogate constructions of normality, rooted in white supremacy, and how Chicanas/os are regulated and governed in societal institutions, particularly schools. Within this frame, the possible outcomes for mestizo male bodies that resist the stringent constructions of Chicano masculinity become apparent. The social construction of the mestizo male body positions him as a member of an oppressed and exploitable class. Within schooling institutions, we need to unpack the significance of the male mestizo body. This epistemological standpoint allows for a lens that connects social relations of production to colonial/neocolonial raced-gendered constructions. With this consideration, we can take into account and critically analyze the different ways that Chicano male students may resist schooling and how these acts often become criminalized as deviant behavior.

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### **Methodology**

The relationship between methodology and a researcher’s theoretical and epistemological orientation is inevitably closely connected (Delgado Bernal, 1997). CRT/LatCrit and Chicana feminist epistemologies inform the methodological approach in this study that serve to employ a research process that can intervene in the deficit knowledge about marginalized and oppressed communities. Aligned with

the theoretical frameworks utilized, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: How do Chicano male youth interpret and respond to their continuation schooling experiences? How is the social construction of Chicano masculinity reproduced within schooling institutions and how do these processes impact the educational trajectories of Chicano male youth? This section will outline the methodological approach of this study that informs the sampling methods I employed, the participants included, and the data collection and analysis strategies.

In this study, I employ a Chicana feminist standpoint to explore the intersections between race, class, gender and sexuality along with the experiences that are intertwined with issues of skin color, immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism and limited English proficiency (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This epistemological frame affords the opportunity for Chicana scholars in the field of education to draw from their experiences and successfully incorporate their cultural knowledge to more appropriately capture the complexities of the social construction of these intersections that operate to marginalize young Chicano male students. Delgado Bernal terms this methodological approach as *cultural intuition*. The Chicana feminist scholar brings to her research: (1) her personal experiential knowledge—shaped by a collective experience and community memory that carries knowledge of conquest, loss of land, school and social segregation, labor market stratification, assimilation and resistance; (2) sensitivity to interpreting data that is both technical and non-technical within existing literature; (3) professional experience that allows the researcher to move into an educational environment and gain insight into the lives of Chicana [and Chicano] students more quickly than someone who has never worked with these students and; (4) the analytical research process that gives insight and understanding about a phenomenon and allows the researcher to include participants in her research. The epistemological standpoints of Chicana feminist scholars opens possibilities for the research community to see new ways that move past limited and deficit scholarship on Chicana and Chicano students.

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## Participants

A qualitative case study design was used in this study to investigate the experiences of 11 Chicano male students within a particular continuation high school, which will be referred to as Howard Continuation High School. Howard Continuation High School (real name has been changed), is located in a socioeconomically and racially diverse suburban neighborhood in southern California. This site attracted me because although the school is located in a racially and socio-economically diverse neighborhood, there was a disproportionate enrollment of Chicano/Latino high school students when compared to the surrounding demographics.

This study employed a purposeful sampling method that involved the collaboration of 11 Chicano male continuation high school students. All 11 collaborators identified as being of Mexican descent. Only one student reported to have been born outside of the United States. Although I had initially intended to interview junior-standing students who had spent at least two semesters in this school, I had

to accommodate these sampling criteria due to the constant transition of students who transfer in and out of this school. Only five students had been attending this school for more than one year at the time this study took place, while the remaining six had been attending Howard between one to six months. At the time of this study, two students held senior standing, four were juniors and five were considered sophomores or close to sophomore standing.

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### Data Collection

In order to provide an account that combined historical analysis with theoretical exploration in an attempt to offer a thorough examination of the educational trajectories of these students, this case study called for participatory observation and oral history interviews. Participatory observation was conducted for a total of three months within and outside of the classroom in order to produce a rich, multilayered account of the relationship between schooling practices and the experiences of Chicano male continuation high school students. Classroom observations took place three times a week. These observations sought to reflect: (1) the overall representation of the population of the target high school, (2) representation of the instructional approach endorsed by this school, and (3) the range and nature of structured educational opportunities for these students. In addition, field notes were taken during break periods, before and after school, and through informal interactions with teachers, students and staff. Data collected from these observations were coded and analyzed. Participant observation data was also used to gain confidence from collaborators to recruit for oral history interviews.

Twenty-two oral history interviews were conducted with 11 Chicano male students. Yow (2005) defines oral history as “the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form” (p. 3). This method was imperative in order to provide a socio-historical account that could further inform the educational trajectories of these students and how they eventually transitioned into this particular remedial schooling institution. Two interviews were conducted with each collaborator guided by a semi-structured protocol. The first interview detailed the demographic background along with an in-depth life-history examination in which each collaborator was asked to reflect upon their educational trajectory prior to transferring to Howard Continuation High School. The second interview provided an account that detailed the experiences of each participant at Howard Continuation High School.

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### Data Analysis

In an effort to provide a more critical and inclusive research process, a three-phase critical race grounded methodology was utilized as a data analysis strategy (Malagón, Pérez Huber, Velez, 2009). In the preliminary phase, several categories and themes were identified from field notes and interviews specific to the research questions. These categories and themes were related to existing theoretical categories of race, class, sexuality, and gender. These themes were then utilized in



the second phase of the data analysis. Two focus groups brought back six of the original collaborators a couple of months later. Themes and categories from the preliminary analysis phase were presented to the group in an effort to receive feedback and dialogue about potential themes and categories missing from the first phase of the analysis. These interviews were not necessarily concerned with bringing about similarities and differences but rather, provided a group interaction to further analyze and produce data that would be less accessible without the interaction (Krueger, 1988). This phase was particularly important for this study due to the limitations *and* strengths of being a Chicana researcher conducting a theoretical exploration on Chicano racialized masculinity in educational discourse and practice. These combined phases aided to construct the final version of themes that were then coded to generate a final analysis.

This study utilizes a theoretical framework that informs the data collection and data analysis strategy. Employing a CRT/LatCrit and Chicana feminist epistemological framework throughout this process seeks to deconstruct dominant research paradigms that produce deficit accounts to explain the experiences of Chicano males within educational discourse. The way that this study is framed, allows me as a researcher to understand and center the experiences of Chicano male continuation high schools through the combination of various data collection strategies. This study centers the perspectives of the collaborators allowing them to analyze their own educational trajectories and their experiences within schooling institutions. These methods are informed through the theoretical frameworks that seek to employ a methodological and epistemological approach seeking to expose, deconstruct, and further theorize about the experiences of Chicano males within continuation education.

## Findings

Chicana feminist epistemologies and CRT/LatCrit frameworks are grounded in a legacy of resistance to the multiple forms of oppression that Communities of Color experience. A commitment to social justice must move towards textual and material techniques that document and engage in the survival and resistance of oppressed communities under sexist, racist, modernist, colonial and capitalist conditions. This includes a consideration in our epistemological and methodological approaches that works at translating the marginalization of Communities of Color at different historical and geographical moments in an attempt to inform a contemporary moment. The findings in this study help reveal the cultural and institutional dynamic between the social construction of racialized masculinities in educational discourse and the high enrollment of Chicano male students in California continuation high schools.

A major theme that emerges from this study is *disengagement* from schooling as a form of resistance. The collaborators in this study begin to highlight when they begin to disengage from their educational trajectory as they resist their experiences of neglect, disrespect, substandard schooling conditions and closed opportunity structures. While theories of resistance attempt to show the importance of media-

tion, power, and culture in understanding the complex relations between schools and the dominant society, much of the current literature on student resistance focuses on self-defeating and reactionary models (Fine, 1991; McLaren, 1994; Willis, 1977). Drawing from the work of others, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) employ a CRT analysis to map out the different ways in which Students of Color resist schooling. The manner in which Solórzano and Delgado Bernal outline self-defeating and reactionary forms of resistance inform disengagement as a form of resistance in this study. *Self-defeating* student resistance exists when students may hold a strong critique of their oppressive conditions yet are not motivated by social justice. Often, these students create further oppressive conditions for themselves. *Reactionary* student resistance happens when a student acts out without any critique and no motivation for social justice. While several of these students in my study engage in self-defeating and reactionary resistant behaviors, my interest lies specifically in how their critiques of oppression may offer a transformative potential that can inform education scholars and practitioners. As Solórzano and Delgado Bernal point out, *transformational resistance* is a progressive action toward social justice that allows marginalized people to develop a critical consciousness towards systems of oppression.

Through the use of oral history methods, the reclaiming of the narratives of these students allows for a reading that connects their educational life history to historically oppressive structures that have strongly worked against their educational outcomes. The perpetual *neglect* of Chicano male students within schooling spaces informed the theme of disengagement. Erick, who attended predominantly Latina/o schools, begins to track his educational decline due to the consistent absence of a steady teacher in his class. According to Erick, this event affected his academic transition into fifth grade as he felt he had not mastered enough fourth-grade material to be successful that school year. Erick recounts persistently asking his fifth grade teacher at the beginning of the academic year for help on classroom and homework assignments. He comments on how the teacher would perpetually deny him help and would accuse Erick of not trying. On one occasion Erick had asked his teacher for help on a homework assignment to which he responded, "you're telling me your parents can't help you with something this easy...figures." Erick marks this as a point when he began to disengage from schooling, after feeling constant ridicule and neglect from his teacher, he comments how he just stopped trying in school all together. The following conversation further elaborates on how Erick rationalizes the effects of this particular time period:

*Maria:* Why do you think your teacher kept denying you help with your assignments?

*Erick:* Because he didn't like Mexicans.

*Maria:* How do you know that?

*Erick:* Because he knew a lot of us didn't have a teacher like other kids

in fourth grade. So he knew some of us weren't ready but he wouldn't recognize that. He would say stuff like, 'you guys don't even care because you're parents don't even care,' and then he would say that Mexicans just come here to have babies and start problems. He was straight out mean, to everyone, because we were Mexican, even our parents. He would help girls out more than guys.


*Maria:* Why do you think he would do that, and what do you mean he was mean to parents? Would he say anything about it?

*Erick:* Like at parent night, my mom and I were late because we were in my brother's class before and we walk in right, and he tells us we're late and closes the door. I don't know why he helped girls more... Sometimes he would tell us [guys] that we were going to be gangsters the next year in junior high so maybe that's why he ignored us.

This particular event reveals the perpetual historical and contemporary frame that feeds the perception of the alleged dangers to societies fundamental institutions from Mexicans and other Latina/o communities (Pérez Huber, Benavides Lopez, Malagón, Velez & Solórzano, 2008). In this case the teacher makes reference to deficit perceptions of Mexican parents and their children. The framing of the "Mexican problem" introduced at the beginning of the last century remains as a topic of discussion in public policy venues that influence a discourse in which, "many educators accused Mexicans of increased crime, welfare, schooling problems, vice, and threats to the racial and cultural homogeneity of the nation" (Gonzalez, 1999, p. 36). Within the contemporary sociopolitical moment we can see that this form of *racist nativist* sentiment continues to dominate the mainstream discourse used to frame Latinas/os and other People of Color as "perils" to U.S. society. (Pérez Huber, et al., 2008).

Erick's recount of his fifth grade experience further informs a racialized/gendered form of racist nativism. Most of the students in this study recount incidents like Erick's, where they would be punished if they "acted out," yet neglected by teachers when they asked for help on school work. The interpretive codes attached to the Chicano male body within schooling spaces become signifiers to many educators that perceive that these students are not active and/or interested in learning, but on the other hand pose potential threats in the classroom. Gonzalez adds that these substandard [racist] schooling practices emerge out an educational system that "never existed to alter class relations" (p. 36). The schooling of children of Mexican descent and the perpetual framing of this population as a social vice ensures the reproduction of the Mexican community as an exploitable class.

A Chicana feminist analysis adds a raced/gendered analysis that incorporates the Chicano male body into a discussion of representation, social control and constructions of normality (Cruz, 2006). In Cruz's study on homeless Queer Youth of Color, she draws from the work of Mauss (1934) and Butler (1988) to link how the social construction of gender performance becomes part of an educational

dimension that facilitates a process of acculturating the body for use whether it is a member of civil society, a student, a worker, etc. In the case of Chicanos, if the social position within a racist/sexist/heterosexist/capitalist regime is intended to reproduce this population as an exploitable member of the working class, the Chicano male student who resists this performative act is negatively sanctioned. If gender is composed as a set of truths of what is “natural” or “true belief,” the racialized/gendered mestizo body that resists becomes perceived as “deviant,” “lazy,” “at-risk,” “criminal.” Cruz further argues that social sanctions reinforce an illusion of these “true” social scripts and concrete identities. The excess (deviant and resistant) movement of the body that is meant for capitalist production becomes punished. Sociological theories of reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) help to further understand the schooling conditions for working class Chicano students, which prepare them to be members of the working class. **When Chicano students resist the racist schooling practices that privilege whites, these acts validate the deficit framing of low educational attainment at the fault of Chicano students and their culture.** 

This is further illustrated in the interviews with Saul, who initially described himself as a “good student at first.” Saul lived in a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood when he immigrated to the United States. He recalls how his schools were really “good” and much better than schools where he lived during the time of the study. At his mostly white school, Saul recounted that he was treated “different” than other students:

*Saul:* There was this one time when we had a sub in my class. Everyone was acting bad. The next day the teacher wanted to know who started it...all those white kids blamed me of course.

*María:* Did the teacher believe them? What happened?

*Saul:* Yeah she believed them, I got in trouble, *all the time*, for things that other kids did too.

*María:* Why do you think she did that?

*Saul:* Because I was the tall, big, Mexican-looking kid. (laughs)

Saul, who was very tall and big in stature, recalled how teachers constantly thought he was a gangster. In this particular school, even as a student who had relatively “good grades,” Saul could still not escape the perception of being a “bad kid.” Saul references how moving to a new school, that was predominantly Latina/o, did not change this perception. He explained how instead of being viewed as a student entering a new school with good grades, he became “just another *dumbshit* to them.” Saul becomes another “gangster” in a setting where teachers hold very stringent perceptions of diversity amongst Chicano/Latino youth culture. While being constantly neglected by teachers when it related to instruction and academic preparation, in instances where Saul “acted out,” he suddenly became the focus of

attention by school staff. This habitual treatment and perception of being a “bad kid” is what eventually lead his transfer later from a comprehensive high school to a continuation program. Saul also made reference to his undocumented status as another reason why he disengaged from schooling. He did however make a clear distinction between the concept of schooling and education. Saul mentioned an interest in learning history and was at the moment fluent in three languages and in the process of learning another—all which he did outside of his school setting. Through a CRT/LatCrit read, we can define the act to disengage in schooling yet *engage* in educational learning as a merging of self-defeating and transformational resistance. As he became critically consciousness of the differences in schooling practices within different communities, institutional neglect that perpetuated throughout the years and then realized an even more limiting opportunity structure due to his residency status, Saul decided to disengage from schooling. Through these experiences, we can begin to see how social and cultural reproduction functions within the realms of educational discourse and practice that limits researchers and practitioners perceptions of Chicano male subjectivity.

Saul’s experiences relate to what Aldama (2002) refers to as the macho/bully paradigm that informs dominant society of perceptions of Chicano males. This hyper-exaggerated perception where the mestizo-identified body constantly appears as being a threat to the system, Aldama argues, is actually a national, sexual, and racial discourse founded on constructed dichotomies that “function as a way to contain, control and uphold the White, heterosexist, middle-class status-quo” (p. 83). This perception is not new within education discourse. Chicanas have already began to interrogate this “macho-bully paradigm” to understand how dominant racial discourse intersects with other forms of subordination. Dominant social scientists describe machismo as a masculinity syndrome particularly attributable to the “Latin” male, and thus by extension to the Chicano male (Baca Zinn, 1980; Sosa-Riddell, 1974). For example in a study titled, *Value Conflicts Experienced by Mexican American Students*, Ramirez (1968) explains that Mexican-American culture emphasizes “machismo” or “maleness” in the young boy. This example reflects the dominant discourse that validates the perception that the culture of Chicano youth is at odds with mainstream values and ideals. The social science image of the Chicano male is rooted in the proposition that these distinctive patterns ill-equip Chicanos (both males and females) to adapt successfully to the demands of modern society. These constructions help us understand the perceived need for the constant surveillance of Chicano men (Aldama, 2002). This discourse further informs how deficit “at-risk” frameworks are shaped and perpetuated in educational research, policy, and practice.

Within my participatory research at Howard Continuation High School, I witnessed various accounts that posited Chicano male students within these stringent raced/gendered constructs that perpetuated the views of these students as “threats.” On one occasion a teacher commented on how Emilio, a new student in her class who she felt was gang-affiliated, “freaked” her out. This view of Emilio as a potential

threat was informed by his perpetual silence and refusal to participate in any class activities. After getting to know Emilio myself, I found out that he was new to the school and had just moved back to the U.S. after living several years in Mexico. He mentioned that he did not talk in the class because he was self-conscious of his accent. He also mentioned that he did not participate or do any class assignments because he did not feel he could communicate and understand English at times. His silence in this new school, becomes a threatening interpretive code for this teacher in an educational setting that expects students to “act out” resistant behaviors. This teacher’s neglect for this student also encourages Emilio’s self-defeating act of resistance which then becomes interpreted as not only a threat in the classroom, but furthers the perceptions that Chicano male youth do not care about their schooling.

Informed by these rigid constructions, teachers at Howard, made attempts to employ a so-called “relevant” pedagogy to reengage youth. This “relevant” pedagogy however only promoted these dominant stringent perceptions as they entered curricular practices. Rudy who in his English class, did not feel like reading the books that he was required to read at his grade level, complained to his teacher about the selection of readings available. His teacher suggested a collection of novels that detailed the experiences of “at-risk” Latina/o and African American, mostly male youth at a high school. These books, as I later examined, repeatedly presented stories of poor, gang-infested high schools where students “act out” yet eventually learned that they needed to change their “self-defeating” ways (i.e., their culture). Rudy replied “Mr. Wells, why you always trying to get me to read gangster books, I’m not a gangster!” Rudy decided at that point to not do his reading assignment all together. When I later asked Rudy to elaborate on this incident he mentioned:

Man I don’t want to read old White man books OR books about gangsters, what’s up with these teachers that think just coz I’m a guy and I’m Mexican I’m a gangster? Give me something that’s real to me and I’ll read it.

Instead of providing a relevant curriculum, rigid constructions that warp students within a frame inform the curricular and pedagogical approach even when these youth do not fit these stringent perceptions about Men of Color.

These stringent constructions of Chicano racialized masculinity, become contested and challenged in the stories of these young men as they negotiate and mediate their multiple subjectivities. Tony, who had confidentially identified himself as gay, accounted his transfer to his current continuation high school to an incident that happened at his former comprehensive high school. One day as he entered his classroom, his teacher asked him where his book was. Tony told him that he had forgotten his book at home. The teacher then went and threw his notebook on the floor causing all of his papers to fall out. The teacher demanded that he pick up all the papers telling him in front of a full classroom, “you’re used to getting down on your knees anyway.” Tony recalled feeling so embarrassed and humiliated that he stopped coming to his comprehensive high school altogether. Tony’s

decision to disengage by not attending school comes as a response that resists the racist/heterosexist and dehumanizing practices employed and sanctioned within a space that dishonors and disrespects these students. A CRT/LatCrit and Chicana feminist frame allows for a reading that more critically examines how these students negotiate, resist, and make meaning of their multiple subjectivities. Through such awareness we can understand how educational life trajectories for young Chicano male students are shaped by racist/classist substandard schooling conditions and deficit frames that view student resistance in an uncritical manner.

## **Conclusion**

A CRT/LatCrit and Chicana feminist epistemology informs the educational research that locates the Chicano racialized/gendered body as central in an on-going negotiation in which multiple, often opposing ideas and ways of being are addressed, appropriated, and negotiated. The bodies of these youth become physical and discursive sites marked within colonial and neo-colonial raced/classed/gendered/sexed meaning-making processes that in turn become a reading literacy that must be learned by educators who choose to work with these populations. This combined framework serves the purpose of deconstructing the racialized and gendered discourses inscribed upon young Chicano male bodies. In this article I attempted to build off the work that attempts to understand how a racist/sexist/heterosexist capitalist regime becomes inscribed in the bodies of racialized and gendered youth. Challenging the deficit discourse concerning Chicano male youth in continuation high schools becomes part of a larger commitment where more work is needed in other educational arenas to further examine how the racialized male body becomes regulated and governed in schools. More importantly we need to further theorize and make sense of how we can draw from the experiences of the bodies that refuse and resist these oppressive structures in order to build upon a transformative praxis. CRT and LatCrit form lenses for educational research that acknowledges the various forms in which racist structures perpetuate the low levels of educational attainment for Chicano male youth. Chicana feminist epistemologies further deconstructs the Eurocentric perspective that has for too long erased and/or distorted the experiences of this population of students. These analytical frameworks must work for students in order to continue the struggle that contests power, ethics, and politics and engages in resistance.

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### Note

<sup>1</sup> I do not capitalize the term “white” in this article, rejecting the standard grammatical norm as a means to acknowledge and reject the grammatical representation of power capitalization brings to the term “white.”

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