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Critical Junctures along the Chicana/Latina Educational Pipeline: Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Perspectives

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The *pipeline* metaphor has long been a useful tool for elucidating the educational experiences of Chicana/Latina students in US schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). While there is certainly no single pathway or monolithic set of educational experiences that characterizes schooling for Latina students (Solórzano & Yosso 2000; Yosso 2006; Covarrubias 2011; Covarrubias & Lara 2014), we maintain that the Chicana/Latina educational pipeline remains a powerful metaphor for highlighting critical concerns related to the experiences of Chicana and Latina students in kindergarten through higher education settings. The pipeline metaphor focuses our attention on metrics and outcomes related to equity, compels us to examine human experiences and institutional settings across the lifespan, and allows us to identify particular points in the trajectory where Chicana and Latina students are effectively *pushed out* of schools. Moreover, as the empirical and theoretical literature on the Chicana/Latina educational pipeline has evolved over the past two decades, various intersectional perspectives (e.g., related to gender, sexuality, national origin, social class, citizenship status) have further enriched our understanding of the diversity and heterogeneity of experiences among Chicana and Latina students (Aleman, Bahena, & Aleman, 2022a, 2022b; Covarrubias 2011; Covarrubias & Lara 2014; Covarrubias, Lara, Nava, Burciaga, Velez, & Solórzano 2018; Covarrubias, Lara, Nava, Burciaga, & Solórzano 2019; Perez-Huber, Malagon, Ramirez, Gonzalez, Jimenez, Velez, 2015). In this spirit, we argue that re-visiting the pipeline metaphor at this particular historical moment can help us to better apprehend some of the overlapping forms of vulnerability that play out in the lives of Chicana and Latina students at various critical junctures along their educational trajectories.

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In this special issue, we seek to highlight a few *critical junctures* along the Chicana/Latina educational pipeline that help illustrate some of the intersectional vulnerabilities that characterize the experiences of Chicana and Latina students in US schools. To begin with, we focus on *high school* as a particularly consequential juncture in the educational trajectories of Chicana and Latina students. Especially for those Chicana and Latina students who have been marginalized in various ways throughout their elementary and/or middle school experiences, high school is often the point in the pipeline where many of these students end up getting pushed out of school. Arguably, this particular point in the trajectory also represents a critical opportunity for repair and healing in the wake of previous experiences of vulnerability and marginalization. We seek to shed light on two hopeful examples—two critical interventions that emerged at the high school level. In sharing these portraits of possibility, we ponder what might happen if more Chicana and Latina youth had experiences such as these, both in and out of schools? Next, we focus on *higher education* as a critical juncture along the Chicana/Latina educational pipeline. Beginning with the premise that not all Chicana and Latina students experience higher education spaces in the same ways, we focus on the understudied experiences of Mexican-American military veterans (who represent a non-traditional pathway into higher education) and on the unique experiences of Chicana/e and Latina/e mothers who are simultaneously graduate students in the academy.

Finally, we zoom out to look *across the lifespan* of one Mexican student who has resisted various intersectional forms of marginalization and successfully navigated multiple critical junctures along the educational pipeline as he has forged his own transnational educational pathway from high school to higher education. In highlighting these distinct junctures along the Chicana/Latina educational pipeline, we deliberately seek to invoke and draw on interdisciplinary methods and intersectional perspectives by showcasing how different scholars use different sets of tools for asking different sorts of questions about the pipeline and different theoretical lenses for exploring the diverse experiences of groups that are positioned differently at these key junctures across the pipeline. In the next portion of this introduction, we lay out more detailed descriptions of each piece in this special issue.

In her article, “The Moral Ethic of *Cariño*: A Culturally Competent Approach to Working with Immigrant-Origin Students,” Karla Lomelí reports on an ethnographic case study of Ms. Grace, a veteran high school English teacher in Silicon Valley who worked effectively

with immigrant-origin Latine youth. Describing how this teacher's perspectives on her Latine students led her to systematically develop culturally competent teaching practices, Lomelí argues that Ms. Grace enacted and embodied a pedagogy that reflected what she calls a "moral ethic of *cariño*." By showcasing how Ms. Grace accounted for, sought to understand, and actively drew on her Latine students' everyday lived experiences, Lomelí provides a portrait of the kinds of teaching that are arguably necessary to support immigrant-origin Latine youth. This article serves as a powerful example of how a non-Latine teacher was able to cultivate and embody effective and culturally competent teaching. Crucially, the approach to pedagogy on display in this article is, unfortunately, not in place for many Latine high school students at this critical juncture in the educational pipeline. As we seek to understand why and how Latine students get pushed out of school at this critical juncture in the educational pipeline, Lomelí points us towards promising possibilities for promoting Latine student success.

Drawing from Solorzano and Bernal's (2001) transformative resistance theoretical framework, Johnny Carlos Ramirez's article, "From Safe Spaces to Sacred Spaces: Chicana/Latina After-School Youth Development and Transformational Resistance," is an ethnographic exploration of youth participants in the Black Panther Mentoring Program (BPMP). BPMP is an out of school youth development program, supporting "at-promise youth" participants in nurturing, mentoring relationships and raising youth's critical consciousness, resulting in the creation of a powerful community counter space. The article explores the experiences of three active participants in BPMP, who demonstrate the diverse ways the program became a safe space, helping them to resist social and academic marginalization experienced in schools and the broader society. Ramirez chronicles how BPMP became a space that helped youth affirm one another at a critical juncture in the educational pipeline. This, in turn, helped expose students to curricular content and experiences in BPMP that ran counter to the harmful traditional curricular content they learned in school. By centering their marginalized identities, BPMP youth felt cared for and supported, displaying a degree of interconnectedness. Ramirez ends by calling for the importance of establishing relationships of trust with "at-promise youth" in school and out-of-school spaces where they can come to see themselves as sacred.

The third article explores the unique experiences of military veterans re-entering the educational pipeline after completing their enlistment. In "Mexican American Student Veterans:

From Military Service to Higher Education,” veteran Alfredo Gonzalez utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the extent to which military service equips Mexican Americans to pursue and complete their bachelor's degree. As we know, disproportionate numbers of working-class Mexican American youth will take this path due to active recruitment and financial stressors, despite active organizing campaigns against militarization in schools over the last two decades (Galaviz, Palafox, Meiners, Quinn, 2011; Mariscal, 2005; Zavala, 2018). Examining this understudied pathway of the educational pipeline, Gonzalez used census data to create a first-of-its-kind Mexican American veterans' educational pipeline. His interviews with Mexican American veterans revealed that they experienced racism and lacked institutional support navigating higher education, but eventually found veteran advocates who provided concrete forms of support and shared key navigational strategies. The article concludes with important recommendations for the expansion of Veteran Resource Centers as conduits to guide and support veterans as they transition to colleges and universities.

The fourth article, by Christine Vega, examines the graduate school experiences of Chicana Motherscholars in doctoral degree programs. In “Motherscholars Traversing the Educational Pipeline through Moments of Sacred Pause,” Vega introduces the concept of *sacred pause* as a form of resistance to academia's hostility and hyperproductivity. These sacred pauses—moments of joy, gratitude, and love—are disruptions and opportunities for these motherscholars to acknowledge their wholeness as parents, their children, and their “mommy wins” against the backdrop of academia that fails to see them as whole beings. Drawing from *pláticas* with three Chicana/e and Latina/e Motherscholars, Vega reveals the specific ways these mothers traversed the educational pipeline, providing for themselves and their children. One example of a sacred pause came from an academic advisor leaving a meal behind in the lunchroom for one of the mothers and her three children, as it affirmed her identity as a motherscholar and helped make the invisible visible. Other examples of sacred pauses that evoked feelings of joy, gratitude, and love included Motherscholars serving as joyful bridge-makers for students from marginalized communities and on the verge of dismissal from the university. Vega concludes with a reflection on the Motherscholars' journey across the educational pipeline in an effort to honor the small moments of joy, gratitude, and love that can fundamentally transform educational and life trajectories.

The fifth article, “An Undocumented Student’s Quest for Acceptance: A Testimonio Analysis Traversing the Chicana Educational Pipeline,” by Argelia Lara, explores in depth the *testimonio* of Joaquin—a gay, unaccompanied, and undocumented Mexican (im)migrant, showcasing his transnational experiences navigating the educational pipeline. Using a Critical Race Quantitative Intersections + *Testimonio* (Covarrubias et al. 2018) framework, Lara traces Joaquin's exodus from a small town in Michoacán, Mexico, as he headed north to escape the physical violence directed at him because of his sexuality. Arriving in US schools, Lara utilizes Joaquin’s *testimonio* as a guiding light to illuminate different structural impediments he encounters at each critical juncture of the educational pipeline. Building on her prior work with Alejandro Covarrubias (2014) on the undocumented educational pipeline, Lara experientially grounds Joaquin’s *testimonio* to reveal the level of structural vulnerability he experienced and why educational outcomes for Chicana undocumented populations are lower than for US-born and foreign-born naturalized Chicana populations. Lara proposes important considerations for educational leaders doing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work at a time when communities of color, particularly immigrants, are facing a backlash in a post-Obama era.

Next, we share an interview that Pedro conducted with Julie Lopez Figueroa, an ethnic studies and higher education scholar who has devoted her career to creating a greater understanding of access and equity issues as they pertain to marginalized populations, especially Chicana and Latina communities. The interview covers Lopez Figueroa’s trajectory across the educational pipeline. It explores how this trajectory informs her pedagogical and mentoring approach towards working-class and immigrant Chicana and Latina students and communities. Lopez Figueroa offers important insights on the intentionality required to be an excellent mentor and teacher, especially for students from backgrounds that higher education institutions were not originally designed to serve.

Finally, Emily Ramos and Pedro E. Nava provide a review of book, *The Chicana/o/x Dream: Hope, Resistance and Educational Success*, in which Conchas and Acevedo (2020) explore the testimonios of Chicana students who resist the role coloniality plays in creating a marginalizing context across the educational pipeline. The authors introduce the Framework of *Atravesada/o/xs* *Nepantleando* (FAN), which they use to examine students’ intersecting identities and uncover structural inequities, while critiquing institutional processes of marginalization. Conchas and Acevedo provide a set of concrete practices and frameworks for

preK-12 and higher education practitioners to enact and provide students with institutional support.

Taken together, the contributions in this special issue speak directly to the kinds of support that are necessary to promote educational justice for Chicax and Latinx students in US schools. Whether by highlighting their presence or their absence in particular contexts, these contributions bring into focus the kinds of structural and interpersonal supports that need to be in place in order to promote more equitable educational experiences and outcomes for Chicax and Latinx communities. These contributions also showcase the various ways in which Chicax and Latinx students assert their agency and engage in active forms of resistance to get ahead—and stay ahead—despite the systematic lack of structural support.

Each of the articles in this special issue represents a unique and critical juncture—and related enactment(s) of resistance—along the Chicax/Latinx educational pipeline. Ms. Grace is actively resisting normative approaches to teaching (e.g., low expectations, deficit frames, assimilationism) by embodying an ethic of *cariño*. BPMP students are developing critical consciousness and a stance of resistance by asserting resistant identities. Veterans are resisting and persisting as they navigate obstacles without structural supports to reintegrate themselves into the educational pipeline. Motherscholars are resisting neoliberal and patriarchal cultures and systems by creating and holding space for themselves and their families. Joaquin, an unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant, is resisting by asserting his *testimonio* of self-affirmation as a queer Mexican who has repeatedly resisted and persisted across multiple critical junctures. Finally, the interview with Julie Lopez Figueroa and the book review of Conchas and Acevedo's *The Chicana/o/x Dream* offer a broader view of the pipeline that helps situate and contextualize the preceding articles by showcasing powerful and hopeful examples of counterstorytelling across the Chicax/Latinx educational pipeline. It is our hope that the insights reflected throughout this special issue can contribute to broadening and deepening our understandings of the diversity and heterogeneity of Chicax and Latinx educational experiences, including intersectional vulnerabilities and ongoing forms of radical and hopeful resistance.

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