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Ensuring the Success of Latino Males in Higher Education: A National Imperative eds. by Victor V. Saenz, Luis Ponjuan, and Julie Lopez Figueroa (review)

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Victor V. Saenz, Luis Ponjuan, and Julie Lopez Figueroa (Editors). *Ensuring the Success of Latino Males in Higher Education: A National Imperative*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2016. 272 pp. Paperback: \$35.00. ISBN 978-1-57922-788-3

REVIEWED BY RICARDO MONTELONGO, Ph.D., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

In her AHSE Presidential Address, Caroline S. Turner (2015) provided a call to action to for scholars to respect and learn from the knowledge gained from childhood, families, home, and communities of origin. Dr. Turner urged academe, particularly those from marginalized groups, to use this knowledge to offer new ways of thinking within higher education. The collection of scholars assembled for *Ensuring the Success of Latino Males in Higher Education: A National Imperative* offer an appropriate response to Dr. Turner's call to action by presenting research that acknowledges and investigates the impacts of those factors stated in her speech. Understanding these factors is viewed as critical in learning the core focus of this edited book—the representation and success of Latino males in postsecondary institutions in the United States.

Researching the achievements and struggles of Latino males is part of the continuing efforts in improving the status of young men of color on college campuses nationwide. While a sizable amount of literature has been collected on African-American males and an overabundance of research on White students, there needs to be specific findings identifying unique cultural factors impacting the success and participation of Latino males. Latina/o enrollment in college increased 500% between 1980 and 2011 (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Despite this significant gain, the foreword of the book reminds readers that about 60% of the degrees attained by the group are earned by females, and both male and female Latina/o graduation rates lag behind institutional averages. The editors and contributors to the book help higher education professionals understand why such a gender gap exists and what campuses can do to effectively discuss and improve factors facing this “fast growing and increasingly important segment of our national population” (p. xix).

The studies compiled for the book are sectioned into four parts offering an informative framework for future research on the topic. First, systemic and structural practices and policies within the educational pipeline are critiqued to highlight urgency needed to work against the rising gender gaps in school achievement and postsecondary attainment. Second, explanations

offered as theories are provided to understand the complexities of Latino male higher education participation. The theories provide awareness of how attitudes and behaviors of Latino males are shaped by societal perceptions, expectations, and racism. Next, findings from several studies focusing on preparation, persistence, and success are shared to inform readers of components useful in narrowing the attainment gender gap. This particular section should be noted for its focus on identifying educational success factors for Latino males rather than emphasis on deficit model thinking. The final section provides important theory to practice recommendations to assist educational professionals and policy makers in developing environments that increase postsecondary aspirations, participation, and success for Latino males, which readers are reminded is a national concern.

The book editors Saenz, Ponjuan, and Lopez Figueroa use Chapter 1 to describe the apparent educational attainment gaps between Latinos and Latinas. Starting with an urgent appeal to readers that the “educational future for our nation's Latino male student population is in a state of peril” (p. 3), this chapter gives context to the crisis by reporting numerous data findings at different educational stages. Using a solid list of data sources, the experiences faced by Latino males that impact educational and career choices are given special attention. Specifically, the chapter identifies the propensity to label these students as at-risk, discrepancies in median income wages, expectations for immigrant males to provide family income, and overrepresentation in military and prison placements. Despite providing “sobering statistics and realities for Latino males in this opening chapter” (p. 17), the authors achieve their goal in instilling urgency in responding to this issue.

In Chapter 2, Luis Ponjuan offers a conceptual model to help explain influences leading to college enrollment. Using statistical data from the 2012 High School Longitudinal Study (HSLS), five factors are constructed to form his college enrollment model. Although the model asserts that certain family characteristics influence the likelihood for Latino males to not enroll and complete postsecondary education, Ponjuan notes family is not to blame. Instead, focus is placed on hardships often faced by students whose parents are immigrants, who speak a non-English language, and who never attended college. Another unique task facing Latino males in educational settings is addressed in the model—their experiences in interacting with various components of their school environment. As the model illustrates, college attendance for this group follows a path that must be understood to create culturally responsive strategies that as Ponjuan states, “utilize the unique attributes of Hispanic families and males to help them academically and socially succeed” (p. 36).

Chapter 3 starts the section on theories built to understand the directions taken by Latino males in their higher education pursuits. Julie Lopez Figueroa begins by giving a personal narrative describing how her brothers dealt with neighborhood challenges. Her personal narrative gives context for use of the term “geography” in her framework. The geography of academic support describes how Latino males understand their position in the college environment by evaluating the extent to which institutions provide resources and opportunities for their academic success. Confronting perceptions, expectations, and definitions of being Latino and male within the college environment are key activities towards navigating this geography of academic support, described as *systemic racialization* and *masculinization processes*. Lopez Figueroa provides a unique explanation in describing how success can be socially mediated by shaping our campuses to allow more “places” that encourage support and help-seeking behaviors.

Chapter 4 provides an inspection of how Latino masculinity is shaped within postsecondary campus environments. Lopez Figueroa, Patricia A. Perez, and Irene I. Vega note that their study focuses solely on Latino males who are heading to or already in college. Unlike other studies, theirs does not have the objective to provide any comparison findings to females. Their goal is to understand how gender expectations affect academic goals strictly from a Latino male perspective. Using grounded theory and the geography of academic support, Lopez Figueroa and her colleagues found that instead of seeking out help resources, Latino males believe asking for help is emasculating, leading them to resolve challenges on their own. The chapter explains that Latino males are in a complex socialization process in educational settings where they also have to become the “man of the house.” Strategies are provided to enhance a more positive Latino male identity in college that encourages help-seeking behaviors.

In Chapter 5, Nolan L. Cabrera, Fatemba D. Rashwan-Soto, and Bryant G. Valencia describe several interesting findings from their study on how race and gender impact help-seeking behaviors. Working with an intersectionality framework, Latino males attending the University of Arizona are described using as context the state’s controversial anti-Latina/o policies passed in 2010. Students experienced racial struggles connected to this political climate and academic struggles associated with the demands of college-level academic work. When it came time to possibly seek help to work through these stressors, Latino males rarely did such activity due to the intersectionality of experiences faced by these students. The finding is explained to be a component of Latino masculinity, espoused through the fear of being perceived as vulnerable,

which aligns with other masculinity studies. The chapter concludes on how Latino college student organizations can be one important resource in encouraging help-seeking skills.

Chapter 6 begins the section looking at research aimed to understand factors to improve positive educational outcomes for Latino males at secondary and postsecondary levels. Chapter authors Ismael Fajardo, Jose M. Hernandez, and Jose Munoz view high school math achievement as an important gatekeeper for future STEM representation at the college level. Their chapter describes findings from a subsample of Latina/os in the National Center for Education Statistics High School Longitudinal Study. The psychological factor of math identity, defined as how a student and others sees him or herself as a math person, has the strongest effect statistically on Latino math achievement. Also important for this group is the positive effect of the cultural factor *familismo*, described as a form of cultural wealth and values. The chapter highlights the importance of including cultural factors, such as family influence, in understanding Latino male progress and eventual achievement.

Lizette Ojeda and Linda G. Castillo in Chapter 7 use their previously published findings from a study of Mexican-American men attending a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) to reexamine perceptions of entry and success at the HSI. The cultural traits of *la familia* and *familismo* are explored to understand their effect on Latino male college persistence. *Familismo* in this study is defined as “the Mexican cultural value of loyalty, commitment, and dedication to la familia...” (p. 118). *La familia*, which translated means the family, is described as parental encouragement for educational persistence. These cultural traits are lenses to understand how traditional gender roles for Latino males, specifically expressions of masculinity through *machismo* and *caballerismo*, manifest into educational settings. The chapter ends with recommendations for research and practice focused on understanding the intersections of gender and ethnicity for Latinos.

In Chapter 8, David Perez continues to examine cultural influences on educational success and uses Patricia Gandara’s (1995) groundbreaking research on high-achieving Latina/os as a template for his qualitative study on Latino males attending selective PWIs. His focus on success avoids research perspectives that focus on what makes them fail. Perez focuses on Latino-based student organizations and how they activate social capital. From participation in Latino student organizations, the males in Perez’s study were provided navigational (skills to maneuver within the institution) and resistant (skills to challenge inequality) capital, contingent on the degree of linguistic (skills re-

sulting from communicating in more than one language) capital. The chapter advances thoughts on the complex relationships Latino students have with Latino-based student organizations. Despite these complexities, Perez understands that positive effects on educational success can result from collaborations with these groups.

In Chapter 9, Tracy Arambula Ballysingh continues to explore social capital in explaining Latino male first-year persistence. The chapter examines how these students create relationships with others and how these relationships expand into action to complete the crucial college first year and move onward to the second year. Ballysingh explains that *ganas*, a cultural factor that signifies desire to achieve academically, provides positive influence on persistence. Latino males connect *ganas* to their academic progress, which is reflective of familial pride and a desire to reach stable financial status. *Ganas* is impacted by who serve as guiding forces and constant sources of inspiration for Latino males. Fraternal organizations are also noted as playing a significant role in Latino male first-year completion, which can be seen as an effect of how these students used student involvement prior to college as a characteristic of academic success.

In applying research to practice, the concluding book chapters offer insights on how the frameworks and findings are explicated in educational leadership and future research. Chapter 10 is one of the most interesting in that Saenz and his team of scholars describe how research on Latino males is received and understood by practitioners in K-12 and university settings. This reviewer found this chapter extremely eye-opening and concerning. Administrators, faculty, and staff awareness of the Latino male gap in educational achievement ranged from very little to high levels. What is concerning is that for some in this study, a rejection of the idea of a Latino male gap was primarily justified using anecdotal data and an unwillingness to deal with the issue. Work is needed to push forward policies to improve the educational experiences of Latino males, and the chapter offers several recommendations for administrators. In Chapter 11, Miguel Ceja contrasts the literature on Latina educational experiences with what is known for Latinos. The research on Latinas is more numerous, thus offering some insights into what factors lead to postsecondary education participation. However, while these insights can offer some guidance, Ceja states the Latino male experience is uniquely different from the Latina experience. The book ends with Chapter 13 and Luis Ponjuan's call to action to create a "collaborative consciousness" (p. 214) developed at individual and organizational levels of education. In this collaborative effort, research is used to create programs and policies that include families and communities to assist educational

leaders to improve the overall educational condition of Latino males. Such efforts should not be the sole work of educational researchers, but as Ponjuan suggests, should be interdisciplinary in that this issue impacts all discipline areas.

After reading this book, one immediately should recognize that the editors and contributing scholars are ones to watch in this expanding field of research. Filled with innovative research that utilizes different research methodologies, theoretical frameworks from several disciplines, and easy to follow recommendations to put findings into practice, Saenz, Ponjuan, and Lopez Figueroa's edited book provides a valuable resource for anyone working to create supportive and equitable learning environments for Latino men. Their book nicely supplements existing work on African American males and answers the need to further understand unique cultural characteristics that shape masculinity and educational outcomes. Thus, this book is important for administrators and faculty who are unfamiliar with how Latino cultural values such as *familismo*, *machismo*, *caballerismo*, *ganas*, and others work within educational settings. Valuable evidence on how campus environments effect educational success is also presented in the findings focused on Latino-based college student organizations. This reviewer's own research on these groups has uncovered some interesting findings and to see studies recognizing their impact on Latino males is indeed appreciated and enlightening. While the book provides a national perspective on Latino males, research on Latino populations can be difficult in trying to capture all the cultural nuances apparent in the group. Thus, one limitation readers need be aware of is the within-group diversity of Latinos can make it difficult to provide generalizations for specific discrete groups (e.g., Mexican American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and so on) within this panethnic term. While the focus is on gender, readers also need to give special consideration on how the intersectionality of other diversity characteristics impact the Latino educational experience to further enhance their understanding on the topic. Readers also have to consider how findings can be impacted by the geographic diversity found in Latino populations. As the subtitle to the book states, the issue of educating Latino males is national in scope, and there should be even more description of how the histories of different regions in the United States influence the current and future conditions of Latinos. While the quantitative studies do make use of national databases, qualitative studies should make note of how these geographic differences impact findings. Despite these critiques, administrators and faculty can gain a substantial amount of knowledge to improve the overall conditions for this student population. By using a success-focused lens, La-

tino males are encouraged to retain their cultural values, and educational leaders are asked to not only be aware of these values but to also use them as tools to reinforce success and learn how to use them to further collaborate with Latino families and communities.

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Peter N. Stearns. *Guiding the American University: Contemporary Challenges and Choices*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 200pp. Paperback: \$38.42. ISBN: 978-1138889279

REVIEWED BY MELODY J. RENSBERGER, TEAM LEADER FOR VOCATION AND FORMATION, FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Peter Stearns' most recent book, *Guiding the American University: Contemporary Challenges and Choices*, provides a succinct overview of the trials and crises faced by higher education today. Stearns, University Professor and Provost Emeritus at George Mason University (GMU), delves into contemporary issues related to shared governance, the spiraling budget and cost crisis, educational quality, academic administration, outdated models of teaching, student services, student success (or lack thereof), and the issues associated with creating a globally relevant university. Stearns includes America's approximately 3,400 Associates, Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate granting public, private, and for-profit institutions of higher education in his definition of an American university.

Stearns' introduction, Chapter 1, prefaces the book's nine topic-focused chapters by describing the polarizing interplay between the crises and opportunities faced by American higher education institutions in the 21st century. Although 62% of the top 100 higher education institutions on the 2014 Shanghai Tao list are located in the United States, Stearns posits that U.S. higher education institutions will fail if they continue operating at a budget deficit and maintaining their low student retention rates.

In each chapter, Stearns discusses a crisis or challenge associated with higher education, provides background and suggestions, and then relates it to his vast experience and tenure at George Mason University. Stearns calls for an "accelerated evolution" rather than a "revolution" (p. 4) and uses the model of GMU to describe what a university is, is not, and what it could be.

Stearns' calls for postsecondary professionals, both faculty and staff, to "blend data and experience" (p. 6), utilizing proven research to improve and modify existing education protocols and practices. Stearns references the research of Clay Christensen (2011), who submits that the necessary new, innovative models will not come from within higher education, but rather outside sources. Regardless, wherever the answer comes from, it is crucial that the question of rising university costs without delivering value must be addressed. A data-driven overhaul of higher education will be required, and although Stearns agrees will not likely come from inside higher education, he does not provide specific recommendations.

In Chapter 2, Stearns provides a history of "public funding" (p. 15), a term used by Stearns to describe federal and state funding, in relation to rising costs and budgets at universities and colleges. Stearns states that although public funding rose in the decades prior to 2000, so had total postsecondary enrollment, hence the per-person budget of public funding has decreased. The author makes the important point that rising tuition was not a reaction to the 2008 recession, although the recession was a contributing factor to escalating costs. Many people blame inflation for the rise in tuition, but Stearns adamantly argues that tuition rose far more than inflation would call for. Later in the chapter, Stearns lists steps that universities could follow as they are reassessing their budget: (1) find new sources of revenue, (2) encourage philanthropy, (3) dialogue with the state to increase state funding, and (4) increase commitment to efficient practices regarding faculty productivity and administrative "bloat" (p. 21). Of utmost importance to Stearns is extensive and open communication among administrators, faculty, staff, and students. He recommends practices put into place by George Mason University of frequent budget forums for faculty, staff, and student senate groups. Stearns set the stage in Chapter Two to address the key priorities of stabilizing budgets and promoting student success in later chapters.

On page 22, Stearns transitions from the cost of universities to the educational product being offered. Specifically, he asks: How can the quality of education be measured, and if the quality is found lacking, how can university faculty be held accountable to their craft? He submits that universities and colleges must be held responsible to provide