

## Understanding the Latinx Experience: Developmental and Contextual Influences

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As we navigate our understandings and expressions of identity, it is also essential to reflect on others' identities, especially those of the students we serve as higher education professionals, and how to support diverse students. *Understanding the Latinx Experience: Developmental and Contextual Influences* offers a glimpse into the Latinx experience to help us better understand and support students who hold this identity and engage with them in ways that aid retention and transition efforts on college campuses. According to the authors, "Latinos represent one in five college students, one in four K-12 students, and one in three children younger than five years old" in the United States (Torres et al., 2019, p. ix). These data points suggest that we will see more Latinx students on college campuses in the near future. Throughout the book, the authors describe how Latinx individuals can be supported as they navigate different and complex spaces in life and within the field of higher education.

Authors Vasti Torres serves as a professor, and Ebelia Hernandez and Sylvia Martinez serve as associate professors at their respective institutions. In addition to these roles, all have ties to the research on and support of Latinx college students in various higher education institutions and other professional settings, offering them a unique lens into this topic. This book will assist higher education professionals in raising awareness within their offices and divisions and creating more equitable practices for all students, especially Latinx students. In addition to the practical pieces this book offers professionals, it can also educate the public about the experiences and support Latinx individuals need to thrive in higher education, a system that was not created to support them.

The volume is centered around the historical and current representation of Latinx individuals in the United States, the intersection of Latinx identity with other

identities these individuals may hold, and how we can support Latinx students through practices and research. One of the major components of this book is the incorporation of Latinx voices. In Chapter 2, we are introduced to various research studies conducted with Latinx individuals in order to better understand their experiences and how to better support them. Out of the various studies mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, the authors take a deep dive into the literature surrounding identity development and showcase one longitudinal study that centers the experiences of Latinx college students. The results of these studies serve as a key focal point for grounding their discussion of the data collected. Specifically, the authors describe the borderlands where critical moments of dissonance and decision-making lie, which aid Latinx students in developing a committed Latino identity. In Chapter 3, we are also introduced to the lifespan model of Latinx ethnic identity development, which was created as a synthesis model to pull together data from different sources alongside the voices introduced in Chapter 2.

From the data collected and various theoretical frameworks surrounding identity development, the authors introduce the lifespan model of Latinx ethnic identity development. This model addresses the identity development of young Latinx adults in and outside higher education as it relates to external definitions of self and how they have explored their Latinx ethnicity. The goal of this model is to aid the development of Latinx students in establishing a committed Latinx identity. Despite presenting this lifespan model, the authors argue that the lived experiences of Latinx individuals are not measurable by a single model; rather, they are constantly changing and adapting with the individual in the center. The lifespan model theorizes that individuals need to go through a stage where they define themselves externally. Within this stage, they can cross the borderlands to explore their Latino ethnicity in more detail (Torres et al., 2019). Once those individuals have developed meaning and crossed those borderlands, then the process of transitions and commitments plays a major role in making sure the individual achieves a committed Latino identity (Torres et al., 2019).

From these experiences, the book also addresses some of the environmental influences that impact Latinx individuals. For example, directly relating to Latinx college students, we can see examples of the impacts that different institution types (e.g., PWI, HSI, MSI, HBCU) and the overall campus environment have on the lived experiences of Latinx individuals. In addition, we can see how cultural and societal factors play a role in influencing Latinx college students, including familial expectations, which directly relate to the work done by orientation, transition, and retention (OTR) professionals.

Throughout the remainder of the volume, the intersections of identities are discussed, as is the tendency for individuals to hold their Latinx identity at their core when engaging in the decision-making process. This is a useful perspective for professionals who engage and support Latinx students in colleges and universities. In addition, there is a heavy emphasis on how Latinx college students show up in higher education and how these institutions can better serve their Latinx population in order to increase their retention and engagement in academic and cocurricular spaces. The text wraps up with future insights into supporting the research of Latinx individuals and on Latinx identity development, more specifically as it relates to college students, through the perspectives of critical race theory and intersectionality. This text includes two appendices: (a) a glossary of terms used by and when referring to Latinx individuals and (b) an in-depth description of the methodology and interview protocol for the longitudinal study that involved the aforementioned voices in Chapter 2 that give us a critical perspective into the experiences of Latinx college students.

Throughout the literature, it is evident that Latinx students, like other students who hold non-majority ethnic identities, have different needs and expectations than their peers in the majority. In relation to orientation, OTR professionals can use this volume to tailor programs, events, and resources for Latinx students and families, who are a growing identity group of future classes of college students. For professionals, this volume should serve as a critical approach to beginning conversations in offices and departments on how to better support, retain, and effectively transition these students into higher education. From a historical context, we can see the important role these students play in campus organizations and departments.

As described in the text, it is important to know that although Latinx identity development models and theories exist, they are constantly changing, just like many other identity development theories. For those individuals who work specifically with transition and retention efforts, this volume touches upon Latinx individuals in higher education spaces, where they highlight the different types of support they have received or would like to receive in order to transition effectively and remain at their specific higher education institution. For those who hold roles more specific to orientation, this text also offers some environmental influences that can shed light on the lived experiences of Latinx individuals and how to craft orientation resources and programs to better serve these groups.

In relation to the appendices of the book, OTR professionals will have the opportunity to see the methodology of studies focused on Latinx college students. Using all or parts of these methods can aid OTR scholars and practitioners in

conducting similar research to learn more from the Latinx population, and other student populations, on their specific college campuses and departments. OTR professionals play a major role in helping Latinx college students feel accepted and gain an affinity for the institution, which in turn feeds into the opportunities these students will receive to further their personal and professional development. As educators and professionals, it is important to be able to identify and relate terms to make sure our students are properly identified. These terms will allow professionals to tailor the language of their programming and outreach efforts for Latinx students and their support systems.

In this book, OTR professionals learn about the different influences on Latinx students to better tailor their outreach and family programming efforts and to include family members in the university experience and overall decision-making. For those who have roles in family member programming and transition, this book does a great job of explaining campus, cultural, and social influences and factors that can relate to the retention efforts of students. The role that parents and family members play in the development of Latinx college students may be one of which many professionals are unaware. Although this volume highlights some of those factors and aspects, seeking out supplemental knowledge on this topic will allow for a more successful transition of family members.

In addition to OTR professionals, this volume can serve as a resource to various other functional areas such as admissions, student programming, housing, international student services, and other critical areas related to student affairs and the undergraduate student experience. I invite colleagues from other areas across college campuses and divisions of student affairs to engage in this volume in order to better understand how professionals can cater to Latinx students and enhance the experiences of all students on a college campus.