

Educational Persistence in the Face of Violence

Narratives of Resilient Latino Male Youth

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Abstract: Latino boys and young men often carry the debt of violence into different spaces. This invisible trauma manifests into disruptive behaviors in schools. It is well documented that violence in urban communities and schools has received significant attention from researchers, but little attention has been paid to Latino male youth as individuals and the various forms of violence they have experienced, and how that impacts educational persistence. This qualitative study focuses on 26 Latino male middle and high school students who are attending two continuation schools to understand the types of violence they have experienced and their educational aspirations after high school.

Keywords: educational aspirations, Latino males, qualitative methods, urban education, violence

The fatigue of violence is often seen as a natural part of life for boys and young men of color in urban communities (Macmillan 2001; Patton and Roth 2016; Rios 2011). Robberies, beatings of friends, and uploading videos with the sound of gunshots and fist fights to social media, and fundraising efforts to pay for a loved one's unexpected funeral expenses are common parts of life for urban youth in low income environments. In 2014, homicides made up 20% of deaths for Latino male youth and young adults in the United States, ages 15–24. This was the second leading cause of death for this group overall. Mexican and Puerto Rican youth are the two most commonly impacted Latino subgroups affected by these forms of violence (Estrada-Martinez et al. 2017). In the United States, only one in two Latino males persist to earn their high school diplomas as “exposure to violence and victimization often results in long lasting impediments on educational progress and success” (Peguero 2011: 3755). Community violence, school discipline and punishment, and students' race and gender composed a compelling dynamic to understand how youth navigate their educational experiences. Overexposure to violence in urban communities may help shed light



on the educational derailment for Latino male youth (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009; Schott Foundation 2015). One must ask *how* and *why* urban Latino males persist to earn their high school diplomas considering the multiple obstacles and challenges they experience daily in homes, schools, and wider communities related to violence and victimization, especially those students who have been frequently removed from school because of their in-school behaviors and, on some occasions, off-campus missteps. This article explores the how and why using a triangle of violence lens is important to reveal the tension of violence experienced for Latino boys and young men.

Most of the social science literature examining violence does not capture why Latinos, especially Latino males, decide to continue with their educational trajectory (Macmillan and Hagan 2004; Peguero 2011; Rojas-Gaona et al. 2016). Many scholars have argued violence leads to early educational departures (Macmillan 2001; Macmillan and Hagan 2004; Peguero 2011) and the relationship between school punishment and victimization emphasizes the need to see and understand the importance of students' voices. This qualitative study examines the multiple forms of violence experienced and the educational aspirations of 26 Latino males enrolled in two continuation schools. These students were previously removed from traditional comprehensive schools because of school discipline violations. The focus on continuation schools is an important, and often missing, element of discussions about the school-to-prison pipeline as these educational institutions serve over-disciplined and expelled students from traditional comprehensive schools (Rios 2017; Skiba et al. 2014). Within the chosen school district, Latino males have been disproportionately suspended and expelled compared to their White male peers and missed close to a total of 50,000 days of school related to school removal (OCR 2018). The need to focus on Latino males is a pressing issue for public policy as Latino youth represent more than one-quarter of the 53 million students enrolled in K–12 education in the United States and are projected to increase over the coming decades (NCES 2019). Additionally, Latino males experience disproportionate rates of violence and victimization outside of schools as compared to their peers (Peguero 2011).

Relevant Literature

Violence in urban communities and schools has received significant attention from researchers (Macmillan and Hagan 2004; Patton and Roth 2016;

Rojas-Gaona et al. 2016). Within the literature on violence and victimization, studies have enhanced our understanding of how male youth of color have been criminalized by school and local police officers (Rios 2011, 2017), how gangs and violence are embedded in schools (Huerta and Rios-Aguilar 2018; Peguero 2011; Vigil 1999, 2003), how violence shapes friendship groups (Chan Tack and Small, 2017; Patton and Roth 2016), and the relationship between community context and violence in schools (Astor et al. 2009; Rojas-Gaona et al. 2016). I will focus on interrelated strands of literature to understand the social interactions between K–12 education, masculinity, multiple forms of violence, and Latino males.

Latino Males in Education

There is a growing body of literature about the experiences of Latino males in K–12 education. Within this emerging research much has focused on Latino male youth holding some form of high aspirations to “be somebody” and not become complacent to the social norms of urban communities by joining gangs, doing or selling drugs, or dropping out of high school (Carter 2005; Carey 2016; Huerta et al. 2018). In one qualitative study, the author found that Latino males hold very high aspirations, including the goal to enter professional careers and become a respected member of the community through the attainment of higher education credentials and degrees (Huerta 2016). Daniel Klasik (2012) found that tenth-grade Latino high school students hold some of the highest aspirations rates (almost 90 percent) to earn a four-year college degree, but unfortunately less than one-third enroll into four-year colleges and universities. Challenges highlighted in the education pipeline include barriers for Latino male students to become college-eligible is the often poor quality of K–12 schooling they receive. Many high schools do not provide equitable resources (Engberg and Wolniak 2010; Klugman 2012). For example, in one study, Eligio Martinez and Adrian Huerta (2018) found that college counselors believed Latino males were not “college material” and thus did not share any needed college information to help them prepare for postsecondary education. Similarly, Frances Contreras (2011) found that many Latino students are enrolled in urban school districts with inequitable resources and services to prepare students for careers, college, and life after high school. Schools systematically prevent Latino males from opportunities to learn and grow into college-ready students through limiting access to one-on-one counseling (Huerta 2015), restricting access to special courses and programs because of students’ school behaviors and attitudes (Flores-Gonzales 2005; Huerta et al. 2017),

and disproportionate overuse of school discipline practices for minor infractions (Lopez 2003; Rios 2011).

Urban youth, particularly boys of color, experience the tension and stress of balancing street life and school engagement (Carter 2005; Conchas and Vigil 2012; Huerta and Rios-Aguilar 2018; Rios 2010). These internal pressures reveal themselves as either valuing “the code of the street” or “going legit” by focusing on school (Harris 2011; Hatt 2007; Reich 2010), and schools often do not know how to balance male students’ external demands placed on them by their peers and community members (Fergus et al. 2014; Huerta and Rios-Aguilar 2018). Schools may simply decide youth should adhere to school expectations and norms without accounting for the possible ramifications of disrespecting street life and culture (Huerta 2016; Rios 2017). Often schools, including continuation schools, do not know how to support at-risk Latino male students. Michelle Behr and colleagues (2014) found that when schools actively engage through culturally relevant practices with students, Latino male students responded by changing past harmful and detrimental behaviors; students were able to refocus their efforts to develop aspirations to attend higher education. In cited study, students were victims of familial and community violence and abuse, experienced homelessness, excessive drug and alcohol usage, and other behaviors that predisposed them for later incarceration.

Masculinity

For boys and young men in school, masculinity is often unconsciously accounted for in how they behave, how they demonstrate academic aptitude, and their presence in the classroom. Masculinity is a socially constructed idea extending to how boys and young men should and must behave in various settings and spaces. School is one space that frequently reinforces the ideas of how boys, especially boys of color, should explore and model their masculinity on a daily basis (Connell 1996; Fergus et al. 2014; Howard 2014; Thorne 1993). Schools play an active role in shaping how young boys and girls understand gender norms and socialization practices. Boys receive subtle nudges and cultural symbols as early as elementary school, which may include how one behaves during recess by being encouraged to run and jump or involvement in sports on the playgrounds which send signals to other boys on “how to be a boy,” often reinforced by educators, on which games, language, and body movements are appropriate behaviors (Connell 1996; Thorne 1993). As boys of color mature, there are internal struggles on whether to be a “school boy” versus a “tough guy” or an “athlete” (Martinez

2018), as they may believe these identities must be parallel instead of intersecting (Carter 2005).

The challenges of exploring one's masculinity and acceptable behavior may result in oppositional or resistant behaviors and attitudes toward teachers and schools (Huerta 2016; Martinez 2018). As Ann Ferguson (2000) found, educators often treat and expect boys of color to behave beyond their years, resulting in their having smaller chances for missteps and resulting in negative attitudes toward Latino boys and other boys of color, in turn reinforcing students' poor attitudes toward education (Malagón 2010). Mark Halx and Moises Ortiz (2011) found that Latino male high school students felt disrespected and undervalued for making personal sacrifices to attend school full-time, as they had multiple external commitments to support their families that were not recognized by educators. Gender and masculinity behaviors are not equitable across racial and ethnic groups. Treatment of boys of color is often guided by perceptions and reinforced beliefs of those students being "lazy," "criminal," or "deviant" (Howard 2014; Malagón, 2010; Rios 2017), whereas for other groups poor choices and behaviors may be interpreted in terms of childhood innocence and be granted flexibility to explore different dimensions of their social and educational limits. Nancy Lopez (2003) found that high school boys of color struggled in schools that used punitive discipline methods to "break" perceived misbehaviors such as talking back or being disruptive in class, which often resulted in being removed being cited by a police officer. These actions are not limited to one school or district but rather a part of a pattern of school system behaviors.

Youth Violence

When youth are exposed to various forms of violence and victimization, it impacts their overall well-being. For youth in urban communities, abuse can happen in their homes, schools, or local communities by the hands of their families or gang members (Vigil 2003). It is important to note that once an adolescent is exposed to violence, this directly impacts their grades and long-term educational attainment, this reality is further compounded by one's race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Macmillan and Hagan 2004). Low-income youth and their families often do not have readily available access to support systems or professional services to manage and treat the psychological wounds of violence and victimization (Macmillan and Hagan 2004). Anthony Peguero (2009) found Latino students to be less likely to be victims of violence in schools, but this does not account for

home and community violence. At times, Latino young men will form friendships with peers who engage in deviant behaviors for protection from community victimization from gangs and local drug dealers (Patton and Roth 2016). It is also well documented that Latino youth are less likely to trust adults and school personnel with personal issues or concerns related to violence or victimization (Rios 2011, 2017), thus carrying the debt of violence without support from their families or trusted nonfamily adults (Huerta 2016; Reich 2010).

Adam Reich's (2010) study of justice-involved urban males highlights that they experienced heightened forms of violence and trauma such as losing friends, family members, and sometimes engaged in acts of vengeance as retributions for the murder of their peers. These decisions may contribute to the long-term derailment of educational aspirations for youths who may be preoccupied with their safety and the well-being of others. Elsewhere, I found that Latino male youth involved in gangs and other deviant groups may not consider higher education as they regard future incarceration or death as impending events (Huerta 2016). However, Desmond Patton and Benjamin Roth (2016) found older gang members often encourage young Black and Latino youth to stay committed and engaged in school activities, to prepare for high school graduation and college enrollment. The psychological costs and labor to youth exposed to violence has been captured in longitudinal survey data that suggest they are less likely to persist to advanced education (Macmillan 2001, Macmillan and Hagan 2004; Peguero 2009). However, more significant questions remain as to why and what is happening to youth in their schools and communities when facing violence, and how increased exposure to violence hinders the development of future aspirations.

Education literature provides limited discussion of violence and victimization, influences students learning, or aspirations for higher education. These lines of inquiry are especially relevant in the literature in education and school practices, especially continuation schools, where institutions have few resources to provide comprehensive services and programs to help students who have experienced different physical or emotional forms of violence (Ruiz de Velasco and McLaughlin 2010). It is well documented that Latino male youth in these types of schools are often the victims of domestic and physical abuse at the hands of parents, guardians, and community members (Behr et al. 2014). These students describe their interactions with local gangs either as active members or as victims in their communities. The culmination of these harsh realities is that students may not easily trust adults and educators. Ultimately, youth experience violence and victimization in

and outside schools, and educators may not know or be capable to support the varying levels of trauma students have faced. Therefore, it is important to understand how Latino male youth with educational histories of school discipline frame and understand their educational aspirations.

Triangle of Violence

Johan Galtung (1969) developed the triangle of violence as a framework for understanding how exposure to violence influences possibilities in student's lives. The framework focuses on the following elements to understand the pervasiveness of violence in society: direct (behavior), structural, and cultural (hegemony). Direct (behavioral) violence is the physical and psychological violence that harms, controls/limits, or kills individuals (cf. Mustaffa 2017). For Latino males, this may include school discipline, concentration in poor and underfunded schools and communities, drive-by shootings, or gang violence. Second, structural violence is the prevention of equitable distribution of resources or opportunities so that individuals are unable to "realize their potential" across social settings such as their homes, schools, or communities (Galtung 1969: 170; Mustaffa 2017). Urban public school educators often adopt a deficit belief that Latino boys and young men do not value education or are not college material (Huerta 2015; Rios 2017). Additionally, systematic efforts by police departments to control youth and use practices to increase detainment and incarceration rates (Noguera 2003; Rios 2011, 2017; Sentencing Project 2017), which results in Latino youth being 65 percent more likely to be detained or incarcerated than their White peers for similar citations. Third, *cultural* violence (hegemony) is the acceptance of dominant ideologies and attitudes that one must accept social stratification and the order of social, economic, and violent conditions as natural (Mustaffa 2017). Grounded in this framework, I push to advance an understanding of how violence shapes educational persistence for Latino males throughout the educational pipeline.

Methodology

For this study, I used qualitative methods to understand the students' experiences and interactions with different forms of violence throughout their lives. Use of qualitative methodologies is intended to develop thick and rich descriptions and uncover the *how* and *why* of the various social phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants (Miles et al. 2014). Data are drawn from

case studies of Latino male students, from middle school to high school ages, focusing on how they received and used the information to plan their futures. It is important to note there were no specific criteria about exposure or direct experiences related to violence or victimization to be eligible for the study; the students simply had to self-identify as Latino and male, and be enrolled in one of two selected schools. I used transcripts to code and identify items related to various forms of violence and educational aspirations.

Data Collection

I used a combination of research methods to gather the data for mentioned larger qualitative study. After each student submitted a signed parental consent form, each student was interviewed in a private office or an empty classroom at their school site. Interviews ranged from 25 to 80 minutes. To understand the individual students' experience and perspectives, I used individual semi-structured interviews, participant observation, written narratives, and reflexive field notes. For this article, I draw the data from the semi-structured interviews and participant observations to highlight the students' voices, as they are often not included in the violence and victimization literature.

Participants

The students in this study ranged from 12 to 19 years old. At the time of data collection were enrolled in seventh through twelfth grade. Most were eligible for free and reduced lunch and their parents had not completed high school or a college degree or credential. Students identified as Latino, Mexican, Mexican American, Central American, or Biracial. Participants in this study had personal experience related to their school behavior, suspensions, expulsions, and most recently involuntary transfers to continuation schools.

Research Sites

Each continuation school is located in Rock County School District (RCSD), a pseudonym for a large urban school district located in the Southwestern United States. The school district serves over 40 percent Latino students and enrolls more than 300,000 students. Over 60 percent of all students qualify for free and reduced lunch across the district. The students are drawn from two continuation schools, which are located in different regions of the RCSD. Both schools serve 100 to 300 students at different points of the academic year, and these numbers fluctuate monthly based on suspensions and expulsions from neighboring feeder schools.

Coding and Data Analysis

As suggested by Johnny Saldaña (2013), I developed a thematic coding related to violence, school discipline, and educational aspirations to understand the interconnected relationships for students. Once the thematic codes were developed, I uploaded the codebook to Dedoose version 8.0.42 and coded each transcript to document moments of direct or witnessed violence, experiences with school discipline and punishment, and educational aspirations. I used a deductive and inductive analysis strategy, which allows data and theory to enrich the qualitative data analysis. The use of this strategy allows the framework and literature to be in conversation.

Findings

Multiple findings illuminate various nuances and experiences with violence and victimization for Latino male students in urban schools and communities. I focus on two interrelated themes: violence and educational persistence. Witnessed violence includes students' observations of police and community violence, institutional violence, and mistreatment in continuation school. Discussions further cover personal experiences of juvenile incarceration or individual interactions with local or school resource officers, and finally, educational persistence, where the student discuss their educational goals.

Violence

The students in this study shared several different forms of violence they experienced or witnessed within their schools and communities. These incidents ranged from the loss a friend to gun violence; a friend shot in the neck during a drive-by shooting in their neighborhood; a school resource officer attacking a friend in high school; and other incidents that raise concerns about how Latino male students are treated in their schools and communities. Not all students in this study experienced the same types of direct violence throughout their lives, but many similarities exist between them. I first highlight Julio, a 15-year-old sophomore, recounting an experience where a school resource officer attacked his peer from the graffiti crew, of which they are active members:

I got kicked out of [another high school] because my friend, he was selling pills and the cops were, like, beating him up ... They were *beating* him up. Like, they were trying to, like, hurt him. They already busted his nose open, he had a split lip already, his shirt was ripped in half, and I was like, "Calm down, he already

said he's done! Why you gotta trip out like that?" And [the school resource officer said,] "What? Are you gonna run up?" [The cops] were getting me mad? And I was all like "Man, you're a cop. Y'all lucky." So, he throws his badge off like, threw it off ... Like, I pushed the cop, he fell [on the ground and we ran away] ... And then when they caught us, they took both of us to [juvenile] detention and we were sitting in the cell and our POs came and drug tested us in our cells and everything. We ... got locked up for two weeks. We came out and I started [here in continuation school].

The image of a school resource officer punching and attacking a male student may shock some educators. Julio said his friend was "done" and not resisting arrest and ready to be arrested, yet the punishment continued. Julio could not tolerate the situation his friend was in and reacted by pushing the school resource officer to the ground so that they could escape. The physical and psychological tolls of violence in schools may remain vividly etched into Julio's memory. Simultaneously, the reality is that Julio accepts violence as a normal process and witnessing a peer be attacked by a school resource officer and other educators may be a standard practice in some urban schools (Lopez 2003; Rios 2011). Similarly, Frank describes his first time being in trouble with a school resource officer during school hours:

I was with some friends and they were going to start a fight in the cafeteria, but we didn't at the end because the [school resource officers] started coming in and so I put my hood up and then I ran out the cafeteria. [The school resource officers] started chasing me, because they thought I was going to do something. I went into a crowd of students and I was waiting right there and the vice principal, he got me, and I was like, "What?" and he was like, "Were you part of that?" I said "No," and then the [school resource officers] came and he was searching me and I had my hands in my jacket and he is like, "Take your hands out, what have you got in there?" I was like, "Nothing," and I just had some iced tea and chips ... I was like, "Nothing, I am going to go to class." He said, "No, you are not," and I tried to pull away from him and he is like, "Stop hesitating," [and said more] cop stuff, and "I am not doing anything," he is like "Go to the walls and spread your legs." I am like "I don't have anything." And he is like "Yeah, you do, what's this," I am like "Some iced tea and chips," and he is like, he slammed me on my head first on the concrete floor at the school ... He fractured my wrist and I got scars ...

In this moment, Frank describes how his peers were going to engage in a fight with others and the school resource officers stopped that situation. He attempted to leave the situation and was stopped and then escalated into "resisting" arrest with the school resource officer. He later had to attend a court hearing and was placed on probation. The structural violence Frank experiences as a minor serve as an example that he is unable to earn benefit of the doubt to simply walk away without recourse. Several students in my sample ($n = 16$) shared questionable and potentially illegal experiences with

school resource officers and local police including citations, searches, harassment, and weapons pulled on them. Another student, Lalo, a 16-year-old junior, talked about the moment his friend was killed by members of a rival crew of adolescent youth:

Like on this side [of town] I got my homie killed down over there by [the high school] right across the street from [the high school], he got shot by the rival crew that were beefing at that time, fuck them and they're some punks, but all it took was one bullet to take the homie's life away ... He was turning 18 last year ... it has been a year [and] 20 days since he has been gone already.

In this incident, Lalo shares how a teenage disagreement with a rival group lead to untimely death of his friend. Although Lalo is not a member of a formal gang, his group resembles the behaviors and actions of a gang. The teenage dispute should not be used to justify the unnecessary death of Lalo's friend and provides context to how possible misunderstanding and attitudes between the groups may have prompted escalation and victimization. The number of instances ($n = 11$) of youth sharing experiences of being victims of gun violence is shocking, as many did not wince or seem stressed by these actions at the time of interviewing. Exposure to community violence is substantive if it does not kill; it impacts and lowers urban adolescents IQ scores (Butler et al. 2018). In another instance, Javier a 15-year-old sophomore, casually shares that others have "pulled a gun" on him multiple times: "Actually, I got the gun pulled on me a couple of times. The very first time was the scariest, the second time I thought I could hang and the third time I just wanted to fight back, but I knew I would have got shot." In each gun incident, he provided the context to a friend fighting another person and an older family member pulled his weapon to prevent any other individual from joining the fight. In the second instance, he was almost the victim of a drive-by shooting and avoided the victimization by running the opposite direction of the vehicle. The third and final time, Javier was walking through a public park when a gang member asked him whether he was gang-associated. Javier said "yes," as many of his close friends are gang members, but an older gang member intervened and allowed Javier to walk away without further incident. These direct and structural forms of violence are important to document, as it helps frame how Latino male youth, especially those enrolled in continuation schools, experience their community context. It's appreciated that over-disciplined youth struggle and are impacted academically because of school removal (Arcia 2006), but mentioned elements are often missing in the needed attempt to move beyond simply identifying what school-based factors cause removal and transferring to continuation schools.

Educational Persistence

Much of the social science literature highlights that youth exposed to violence have a higher probability of prematurely leaving school before earning their high school credentials. Of the 26 students in this study's sample, only Emanuel expressed doubt about earning his high school diploma: he believes he will not be alive either because of overdosing on drugs or gang violence. Of all participants, Julio's comments clearly captured the sentiments about the value of a high school diploma and the limited possibilities should he not graduate in the coming years:

I just need that diploma, that piece of paper that says you finished school. That's all I need ... 'Cause without a diploma, you ain't nothing. This is the United States. Without a diploma ... you can't even work at McDonald's without a diploma. With a diploma, you could do mostly anything. It's easier in life with a diploma. That's what it is. That's what my parents and everybody says. That piece of paper. That's all you need, is that diploma. 'Cause my older brother graduated too, so I don't want to let my mom and dad down, and I ... 'cause if he can make it then I can make it, why not? 'Cause he was fucking up just like me too, he'd been to continuation school and all that, he made it, so I can make it too if he could.

It is important to note that Julio has been a victim of gun violence, has been arrested and sent to youth camp for probation violations, and has a long record of suspensions and expulsions yet understands he needs to persist to earn a high school diploma. Although Julio accepts the structural violence in his life, he hopes and sees opportunity to earn his high school diploma. During field observations, it was common for his continuation school teachers to tell him he would return to continuation school in the near future because of his behavior and will eventually be incarcerated because of his bad attitude and behavior. Julio did not receive these attempts to stunt and limit his opportunities well, as he would push against the dominant negative attitudes held by schoolteachers that youth with multiple suspensions and expulsions were not worthy of further education completion or attainment. Julio does not see higher education as attainable because his family is "poor" and from the "ghetto," which, to him, limits what is possible for him in economic terms to finance any expensive college education.

Other students stress the value and need of some form of postsecondary credential, certificate in auto mechanics, art design, culinary craft, or ambitions of a four-year degree in order to have increased career and economic mobility, as future opportunities are important to them. Oscar, a high school senior, shared his goal of attending community college and then transferring

to a four-year university. Oscar is a member of a graffiti crew, was formerly incarcerated in a youth facility, was harassed and illegally searched by police, and has been exposed to various forms of violence including fights with rival crews. He comments about his educational goals of attending college and helping other youth:

Oscar: I want to go to college. I already applied for [community] college. I already applied for FAFSA. I already applied for scholarships. I got two scholarships ... I'm going to [community college], and from there I am going to transfer to [a four-year university].

Researcher: So, what do you want to study?

Oscar: I want to study law.

Researcher: You want to do criminal justice?

Oscar: Criminal justice, criminal defense ... I've been in the shoes of juveniles when they've been in detention centers and it's just, like, being behind those bars and going to court and seeing the other side ... And I feel like if I was a lawyer, a criminal defense lawyer in the juvenile system, that's what I want to be, I could help these students—juveniles out. Be like, "Check this out. I been through there one time. I know the doors, I know the shoes of being inside and being outside. I know how it is ... Kind of bring them some knowledge about reality, and like, "You don't need to be right here ... You could change ... This ain't life. Like, you could be out there, living a normal teenage [life] rather than being here and living something that ... adulthood or something else, something to old to be lived." I feel like I could change the way juveniles and lesser crimes ... you know?

Oscar's comments includes his goal to study law to help youth similar to himself who do not have the resources to fight frivolous police citations, have limited support in juvenile court, and need a mentor with street credentials. An educational challenge for the Latino male students in my sample ($n = 22$) is that although they hold high ambitions to earn college credentials and degree, many were unaware of how to become college eligible or finance their postsecondary education. The challenge of becoming college-ready is further compounded by the students' teachers and counselors who believe the students are not college bound and do not warrant the investment because of the high number of school suspensions and expulsions.

Juan, a sophomore with first-year academic units, stresses the importance of advance education for him is to be able to make his mother proud and having a "good job." He was expelled from his previous high school for being under the influence and possession of marijuana: "You know, what I see—when I think about my future, I see me at least having a good job. Being a lawyer or a doctor, you know? To prove to all of those people that had no faith in me—to prove them wrong. And also, to make my mom proud, you know?" Juan, as many other students in this study, shared hopes

of proving an adult wrong by becoming successful. Often, the students hoped to prove educators wrong, as many teachers and counselors believe the students are incapable of achieving much with their lives. Twenty-two of the 26 students hold aspirations to earn some form a postsecondary credential in their futures.

Discussion

Most extant studies on urban male youth and school discipline focuses on academic failure and eventual disengagement from education. This article served to highlight the tensions Latino male youths encounter between a triangle of violence and their educational opportunities. Students' experiences demonstrate that Latino males are considering positive pathways after high school but will require the investment and support from caring adults and school personnel. It shocks the mind that some of the Latino males cited in this study matter-of-factly shared their experiences of being the victims of gang and urban violence but still maintain goals of careers and stability to prove others wrong.

My own findings counter the finding (Macmillan 2001; Macmillan and Hagan 2004; Peguero 2011) that youth who are victims of violence or engage in violence behaviors are more likely to leave school prematurely. Many students openly shared their personal and exploratory career goals after high school. These findings are important for education, sociology, and criminology scholars to consider when discussing Latino male youth and other boys of color who are frequently suspended and expelled from school. To further situate the concern to focus on educational persistence for students who have been suspended or expelled from school, Tracy Shollenberger (2015) found that males of color who have had one or more out-of-school suspensions have less than a 5 percent chance to earn a four-year degree. Although these students do not fit the "traditional" mold of college-going behaviors, it is important to note they are strongly viewing postsecondary educational pathways as a necessary tool for social mobility. However, institutional challenges may still manifest for this group of students as counselors, and other school educators may simply focus on high school completion versus college preparation.

Contribution to Policy on Reduce Inequalities

Previous studies of violence and educational attainment have often focused on the racial binary of Black and White youth, with no substantial dialogue about Latinx students or Latino males in general. This lack of attention poses serious challenges to policy and practice recommendations to K–12 educators and leadership on how to engage and support students who have experience violence and trauma. Should educators continue to ignore the socio-emotional needs of Latino male students, there may be an increased institutional response to suspend and expel students who “act out” without provocation. It is well documented that students who often act out in school are seeking attention from adults. The common result is that if Latino male students are then suspended and expelled, it increases the probability of juvenile incarceration and then letter involvement with social service. This has obvious implications for economic and educational immobility (Rumberger and Losen 2017). Latino males possess neither the social safety nets often available to White males (Terriquez 2014; Vallejo 2012) nor the accumulated wealth to draw on should there be a misstep or need for legal support.

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