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Sueños De Los Flyover States: Narratives of Latino Males in the Great Plains

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Abstract

In this study, we use a narrative inquiry approach to present the stories of two Latino males attending community colleges in the Great Plains region of the United States that includes the Dakotas, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, popularly referred to as "flyover states." The purpose of this inquiry, part of a larger study in an area of the United States that goes largely understudied in research on immigrants in community colleges, was to examine the ways in which race and immigrant status inform career and educational aspirations in the lives

of Latino males. After presenting narratives of the two students, we highlight ways in which their stories showed their meaning making around their social identities, how their aspirations were informed by these social identity statuses, and describe how their experiences were shaped by the Great Plains context. Findings and implications are discussed.

Amidst growing demographic shifts in the United States, higher education researchers have paid increasing attention to Latino/a/x[1] students' experiences and outcomes within postsecondary institutions. Inherently, a focus on the Latino/a/x college student population warrant a spotlight on community colleges, as these institutions generally enroll a disproportionate number of Students of Color as compared to 4-year institutions (Ma & Baum, 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). As researchers attend to issues for Latino/a/x community college students, there is growing attention to what has been reported as widening gaps in degree and certificate completion and transfer among Latino males relative to their female counterparts (Abrica & Martinez, 2016; Abrica, 2018b; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011).

   While there has been increased focus on Latino/a/x students in community colleges—and Latino males more specifically—regional differences in experiences and outcomes are largely ignored. For example, there is limited attention paid to state and regional variation in population growth among the Latino/a/x population (Hatch, Mardock Uman, & Garcia, 2016; Zerquera, Acevedo-Gil, Flores, & Marantal, 2018) and how such growth potentially translates into equitable participation in postsecondary education (Hatch, Garcia, & Sáenz, 2016). The absence of information about the different contexts in which Latino/a/x students attend community colleges has important implications for research, policy and practice.

   For example, Zerquera et al. (2018) point out that community colleges will be ill-equipped to support the Latino/a/x population absent information about the extent of the Latino/a/x enrollment growth at a state by state level. They note that "by focusing on national trends alone, research glazes over these key differences in college enrollments and leaves the narrative of Latina/o/x college students as incomplete"

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1. The term Latino/a/x is used broadly to refer to male, female, gender nonconforming, and gender queer individuals who are racially identified under the Hispanic or Latino umbrella term. The term Latino is used to refer explicitly to Latino men.

(p. 97). While there has been Latino/a/x population growth in *flyover states* like North and South Dakota (O'Keefe, 2016), Iowa (Kilen, 2017), and Nebraska (Gouveia & Saenz, 2000; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005), there is an overall lack of understanding of how this growth might translate into educational access, equity, and success for Latino males or other Students of Color.

One precursor to educational success are students' motivations, aspirations, and career goals. Decades of higher education research has included educational aspirations and career decision-making as a key focus (e.g., Laanan, 2000, 2003). Yet this focus has not attended critically to the ways that race and racism intersect with generational status to shape these outcomes (Harper, 2012; Poon, 2014). Thus, not only has extant literature privileged 4-year institutions to the exclusion of 2-year community college contexts (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez- Orozco, 2011), it has also not included a critical, intersectional look at how both racism and anti-immigrant contexts inform such aspirations and career decision-making.

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which race, ethnicity, and immigrant status inform career and educational aspirations among Latino males in the context of what are popularly called the *flyover states*, the mid-western region of the United States that includes the Dakotas, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. Guided by a Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCRT) framework of *racist nativism* (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2010, 2016; Pérez Huber, Lopez, Malagón, Velez, & Solórzano, 2008) we address the following research question: How are educational aspirations and career decision-making informed by race and immigrant generation in the Great Plains for Latino males? Put another way, in what ways do race and immigrant generation inform students' experiences in Great Plains community colleges?

Literature review

Experiences of Latino men in community colleges

Though the Latino/a/x population continues to increase in the United States, literature on the experiences of Latino males in community colleges remains scarce (Harris & Wood, 2013). Within the research that

does exist on Latino male community college students, there has been a focus on a range of topics including students' mentoring experiences (Torrens, Salinas, & Floyd, 2017); the role of family in helping students navigate the community college (Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, Peterson Drake, & Guida, 2018); student interactions with faculty and staff (Rodriguez, Massey, & Sáenz, 2016); financial literacy (Salinas & Hidrowoh, 2018); expressions of masculinity (Vasquez-Urias & Wood, 2015); and Latino males' relationships with their fathers (Sáenz, de Las Mercédez, Rodriguez, & García-Louis, 2017). Others have focused on institutional level and state factors that promote success for Men of Color (Rodriguez, Garbee, Miller, & Saenz, 2017; Salinas & Friedel, 2016; Vasquez-Urias, 2012). Though topically far-reaching, this growing body of research is only beginning to critically engage Latino/a/x as a racialized group with different experiences that are simultaneously informed by race *and* immigrant generation status. An example of such engagement is by Abrica and Martinez (2016), who examined the ways in which race and immigrant generation may intersect to differentially shape how Latino males may respond to financial barriers they face in the community college.

There has also not been sufficient engagement with how race and immigrant generation may coalesce to shape the educational experiences and outcomes of Latino males in community college contexts outside of places like California (Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010; Villarreal & García, 2016) and Texas (Garcia & Garza, 2016; Ponjuan & Hernández, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2017; Sáenz, Lu, Bukoski, & Rodriguez, 2013; Sáenz, Mayo, Miller, & Rodriguez, 2015) where Latino/a/x populations are extensive. Only two articles on Latino males included the study sites of Illinois (Baber & Graham, 2015) and the mid-Atlantic coastal region (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013). The consequence of this dearth of research is a portrait of Latino males as a monolithic group that—based on a shared racialized and gendered identities within large, stratified, and multiethnic communities—inherently experience a predictable list of challenges (e.g., lack of mentoring, lack of financial and intuitional support, pressure from family to work, and so forth). Narratives are helpful to move beyond simplistic assessments of the *problems* Latino males face (Abrica, 2018a; Vasquez-Urias, Falcon, Harris, & Wood, 2016), toward an understanding of how race and immigrant generation—or more specifically, racism and anti-immigrant sentiment—profoundly affect educational outcomes in unique, context-bound ways.

Educational and career aspirations: The role of race and immigrant generation

A wide body of interdisciplinary literature has focused on educational aspirations and career decision-making among immigrant populations, much to the exclusion of an emphasis on race and racism. For example, higher education literature has consistently identified that immigrant students are often influenced by parents to pursue careers in the medical field that parents believe will lead to upward social mobility (e.g., Erisman & Looney, 2007; Laanan, 2000, 2003; Leong & Gim-Chung, 1995). However, as Kim and Díaz (2013) pointed out in their extensive review of literature on immigrants in higher education, this work is somewhat outdated and often ignores ethnic subgroups in favor of broader racial categories. Poon's (2014) study of Asian students in 4-year institutions is one of very few to critically engage how immigrant adaptation and racial formation—of which racial microaggressions are a tangible embodiment—simultaneously shape educational aspirations and career decision-making. She describes that the overemphasis on familial and cultural influence on career and educational aspirations sidesteps the privileging of racialization in shaping Asian students' experiences. Poon (2014) writes: "Although newer research has suggested that discrimination plays a role in limiting Asian American career choices, most of the extant research has framed discriminatory experiences as outcomes of acculturation, therefore, privileging immigrant acculturation over racialized experiences" (p. 503). Kim and Díaz (2013) acknowledge that career and aspiration literature has focused mostly on immigrant youth and Asian ethnic groups and must begin to systematically examine "how individual attributes (personal characteristics and goals), cultural value orientation, immigrant status, labor market condition, and immigration trends shape immigrant college students' career decisions and trajectories across different racial and ethnic groups" (p. 73).

Meanwhile, sociologists have long focused on the ways in which immigrant generation among racial and ethnic minoritized youth. Prominent sociologists have emphasized that children of immigrant parents rely on a cultural narrative or a story of an honorable past, an authoritarian parenting style, traditional forms of cultural capital or the attitudes and/or behaviors associated with a middle class lifestyle, and family dynamics like gender and birth order (Portes & Fernández-Kelly,

2008). An "immigrant optimism"—a belief in upward social mobility and the American Dream—is believed to propel the success of children of immigrants (Kao & Tienda, 1995, p. 1). While this body of sociological literature lays an important foundation for understanding the ways in which race and immigrant generation shape perceptions of opportunity and educational aspirations among different racialized populations, it too is limited. It does not often centralize students' lived experiences or the ways in which they navigate the complexities of racism and nativism. Moreover, it does not include a focus on the postsecondary context of community colleges as it is concerned with assimilation and acculturation more generally.

Conceptual framework

Guiding our analysis and reporting of participant narratives is a Lat-CRT framework and the related theoretical construct of *racist nativism* (Pérez Huber et al., 2008). LatCRT is a theoretical offshoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theory that originated in the law but has been applied to examine structural racism as it effects on People of Color, particularly in the context of education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson- Billings, 2009). Central tenants of CRT include a focus on the ways in which intersecting forms of oppression shape the experiences of People of Color, an emphasis on the lived experiences of People of Color navigating systemic oppression, and that race and racism are endemic to all social institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson- Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso, 2005). LatCRT applies these tenants to articulate the specific forms of racial oppression faced specifically by Latinas and Latinos, particularly as it intersects with ethnicity, immigrant generation, language, and culture (Pérez Huber, 2016; Pérez Huber et al., 2008). Combining the tenants of Lat-CRT with an emphasis on anti-immigrant sentiment, Pérez Huber et al. (2008) define *racist nativism* as:

> The assigning of values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is to be

perceived white,[2] over that of the non-native, who is perceived
to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the
right of whites, or the natives, to dominance. (p. 43)

Racist nativism is thus a complimentary frame that, along with LatCRT,
names the inextricably linked form of social oppression that is racism
and anti-immigrant sentiment (i.e., nativism) tied together. The appli-
cation of LatCrit and racist nativism, in this study, frames how the edu-
cational aspirations and career-decision-making of Latino community
college students is informed by what a number of scholars have de-
scribed as a hostile racial and political climate for Latino/a/x students
(Flores, 2010; Gándara & Mordechay, 2017; Lara & Nava, 2018; Pérez Hu-
ber, 2016; Shelton, 2018), embodied by the repeal of the Deferred Action
for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy and prominent derogatory pub-
lic speeches about Latino/a/x immigrants within the Trump era (Pérez
Huber, 2016).

Situating racist nativism in the Great Plains Region

The Great Plains is comprised of states that are, in general, predomi-
nately white, conservative but are undergoing rapidly changing demo-
graphics (Center for Public Affairs Research, 2017; Pew Research Center,
2015, 2018; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005). Indeed, these states can be
referred to as *new immigrant destinations*, geographic contexts not tra-
ditionally associated with large flows of immigrants like those of large,
urban cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, or New York (Massey, 2008).
Historically, settlement in the Great Plains has always been linked to
the growth of meat-packing and sugar-beet industries (Luebke, 1977).
As new populations migrate into predominantly white, conservative
areas, it is not unusual for there to be racial hostilities and anti-immi-
grant sentiment (Center for Public Affairs Research, 2017; Hamann &
Valdés, 2003; Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). Researchers have
noted increased residential segregation and anti-immigrant sentiment
in Nebraska, for example, as areas surrounding meat-packing facilities
become increasingly homogenous, predominantly Latino immigrant

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2. In reference to a racialized category, the term "white" is left uncapitalized while reference to
   and center the lived experie People of Color is capitalized. Such is practice in critical work
   that seeks to decenter whites nces of People of Color.

communities (Benjamin-Alvarado, DeSipio, & Montoya, 2009; Center for Public Affairs Research, 2017; Gouveia, 2006; Gouveia, Carranza, & Cogua, 2005). In light of these demographic shifts and a resultant *racist nativist* ethos embodied by electoral politics (Pérez Huber, 2016) in these areas, LatCRT and racist nativism are appropriate conceptual tools for the present study.

Methods

This study is part of a larger research project focusing on educational aspirations and career decision-making among Middle Eastern, Asian, Latino, African, or African American immigrants and children of immigrant parents attending community colleges in the Great Plains. The qualitative design allowed for us to explore the phenomenon of how participants' intersecting forms of oppression shaped aspirations and decision making (Moustakas, 1994). We focused on understanding the ways in which race, ethnicity, and generational status coalesced in the lives of individuals to shape their aspirations and career decision making. While the broader study employed a phenomenological design, a variety of analytic approaches were employed to closely examine the experiences of specific demographic groups within the larger dataset. Latino males represent a distinct analytic sample of a larger population and are the central focus of this paper for reasons previously explicated.

Sampling

We used a purposeful sampling approach to identify individuals who could speak to the intersections of race, ethnicity, and generational status as it informed educational aspirations and career decision-making in the community college. The sample was limited to individuals who were enrolled in any community college in the Great Plains, at least 19 years of age, and self-identified as either first generation immigrants or refugees (individuals who migrated to the United States over the age of 5), 1.5 generation immigrants (children brought to the United States under the age of 5), or children of immigrant parents (children born in the United States to immigrant parents). In fall 2017, the research team interviewed a total of 14 participants. Of those 14, a total of six participants identified as Hispanic or Latina/o/x. The gender breakdown for the six

total Latino participants was: Latina female (3), gender queer Latinx (1), and Latino male (2). In light of our interest in examining experiences of Latino males, we treated this as an analytic subsample and analyzed the gendered and racialized experiences of Latina/o/xs separately. Due to space limitations in a journal manuscript and an interest in understanding the nuances of two participants (Wickersham & Wang, 2016), findings from interviews conducted with Latino males subsequently enrolled in the study are not included in this report.

Data collection

Data were collected via semistructured interviews, which allow the interviewer to ask specific questions but also ask follow-up questions in an unstructured way (Schensul, LeCompte, & Schensul, 1999). Specifically, participants were asked to describe their educational and career aspirations, their perceptions of their community college and the Great Plains context, and the things that both challenged them and supported them (on and off campus) in their educational journey. They were asked specifically to talk about racial and ethnic identifiers, why they identified as they do, and to describe the meaning of these identities as it shaped their pursuits.

Data analysis

To analyze the data collected, we relied on a narrative inquiry approach (Boeije, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1995). This approach was appropriate given our interest in understanding the complexities of how students' racialized, gendered, and generational status informed their educational and career aspirations in the context of the Great Plains. That is, it allowed us to consider how students navigated and negotiated multiple and intersecting social identities and to assess how these informed their aspirations (Wickersham & Wang, 2016). Thus, rather than looking at a qualitative interview transcript and coding it, a narrative inquiry approach allows for the construction of a narrative or story from the participants' interview that is subsequently coded for themes. Multiple iterations of the narrative for each participant were written, discussed, and revised to ensure that narratives captured the main elements of each of the participants' transcripts (interaction between participants and their social contexts). Then narratives

were coded using first (descriptive and in vivo) and second cycle coding (focused and axial) (Saldaña, 2013).

Trustworthiness and researcher positionality

A number of provisions were used to ensure trustworthiness of our findings. Namely, we engaged in weekly research team meetings to discuss the interrater reliability of the coding work done in pairs, content of research memos, and engage in researcher reflexivity. Leading the research team efforts was the first author. She identifies as a Chicana female who has conducted several studies of the experiences of Latino males in community colleges (Abrica, 2018a, 2018b; Abrica & Rivas, 2017; Abrica & Martinez, 2016). The second author identifies a white male, whose experience in a mixed Latino and international extended family has led him to similarly conduct several studies on the experiences of minoritized groups in higher education. The third author identifies as a Chicano male, born in Mexico and raised in California, who attended and transferred from a community college in the Great Plains.

Narratives of David and Saul

Before an explication of themes from our narratives, we first present the stories of our two participants, David and Saul. Both David and Saul attended community colleges in Nebraska. David attended a rural community college, and Saul attended one that was more urban. Each narrative is organized around most significant life experiences of each student, with particular attention to how race and immigrant generation informed the development of their aspirations in the context of the Great Plains. In turn, we outline themes in the narratives and explore how these stories converged or diverged in terms of answers to our research questions.

David

David is 19 years old. His family migrated from Mexico to Nebraska when he was 7 years old. Upon arriving to Nebraska, David struggled to learn English and said that language was a significant barrier to his

educational success in high school. He and his family live in a predominantly Latino community in a rural area surrounding a meat-packing facility. His parents and extended family members—some documented and some undocumented—all work in the beef industry, which is "the engine that powers the state's economy" (Nebraska Beef Council, 2019).

Seeing his family work agricultural jobs made Saul desire to do something else. Following high school graduation, he decided that he wanted to become a mechanical engineer. He said:

> I always wanted to go to a university so I know that's kind of out of the price range. I was going to be a mechanical engineer, but *the closest thing* to a mechanical engineer would be a mechanic so I went to a community college to learn mechanics. (emphasis added)

For David, going to a 4-year university was "not realistic" due to financial constraints. He had a strong fear that if he were to take out any loans he would not be able to repay them, stating, "I don't have the funds. If I went getting loans and all that, I don't think I could pay them back. It would take too long." Thus, he sought to attend community college and complete a certificate in an automotive-related program. Working part-time at a car repair shop, he described himself as a "low end mechanic" who does all the "crappy little work" that the head mechanic doesn't want to do. His career goal was to become a higher tier mechanic in the area and to help support his family financially.

When asked about any challenges or supports he encountered, David said that race and racism were the primary challenges he faces in his daily life. David recounted heart wrenching experiences— direct and observed—with overt racism. He tearfully recalled peers bullying him with racial slurs like "terrorist." He stated:

> Race is a problem in this area. There are maybe only three Latinos on campus. It is definitely hard especially how things are going on right now. Most of the people I go with are not educated. It's really tough. DACA and just how Trump, like, people think like him. It makes it hard to go to school with them.

Sadly, much of David' narrative focused on the ways in which community college counselors, advisors, and faculty were complicit in

perpetuating or letting much of this abuse go on. He said that faculty in class "let things slide more than they probably should have." He went on to state: "Like my instructor, he can hear what other people are saying, he just lets that go by." When asked how he dealt with these issues, David said that he just "tried to push it away because it's in the past." David felt unsafe in reporting any incidents on or off campus for fear that others would find out. He explained that in a small town, everyone knows about everyone else's business. If he were to report any students or faculty, he implied that he feared retaliation in the form of violence toward himself or his family. He recalled incidents where counselors talked about other students right in front of him, and he explained that there is no private way in which he could seek help from a community college leader, administrator, faculty member, or counselor. David's story was an emotional one characterized by expressions of lack of safety both on and off campus.

Saul

Saul was born in rural Nebraska to parents from Honduras. Growing up, he would go to Honduras at least once a year and described having strong familial connections there. He explained that although his parents were "educated in Honduras," they were largely unable to help him navigate postsecondary pathways in the United States. He noted how his high school was small, and counselors were not prepared to support a growing Latino population. In high school, he surveyed the various colleges around him (both 4-year and 2-year) and decided to "follow" his friends to their college. He aspired to transfer to a 4-year institution, but was caught in a pattern in which he "dropped out and then went back to school and then dropped out again and now I'm back to school." After attending different 4-year and 2-year institutions, he described himself as "blessed" to be in a community college that he felt would help him to reach his goals.

An important influence in Saul's story were his entrepreneurial parents who owned a small business. He explained that his parents "Own clothing stores...we supply all the Hispanic stores here in the Midwest. If you walked into one of the Mexican stores here in town, everything you see there, 80% comes from us." Saul frequently engaged business negotiations on site with Los Angeles-based wholesalers and

local Great Plains retailers. For instance, he relayed a number of disjointed flashbacks and hypothetical scenarios to demonstrate his business acumen. He said:

> Let's say you have a store. I'll walk in and I'll ask you…. some people didn't tell me until I legit sat them down and told them what I do. I ask, 'How much do you pay for that jean?' Of course, you're not going to tell me how much you paid because you're trying to make a profit. Back of my head, I'm ready. There's only a couple of other people who do this so I already know how much you're going to pay, but I'm going to act like I don't know. If you're paying $20 and you're selling it for $30, you're only getting a $10 profit. What if I told you I'd sell it to you for $12 and you make a little bit more profit. That's when they trigger, 'Let's talk.' If you buy two or three dozen of this, I'll lower the prices because what we did in L.A. is we went right to the factory where we made it and bought dozens and dozens of everything and we had it shipped over here.

Saul explained how his parents' business works in a very detailed way. He also explained how his own business dealings were going—he had just joined an advertising company. He explained that this kind of business is a "person-to-person sales, direct sales" kind of business wherein it is "all about who you know. I know a lot of people…I see the big picture of business." Saul portrayed himself as resilient, driven, and blessed with success.

In a scattered way, Saul described enrolling in business classes to support his entrepreneurial enterprise but, also, his mother's desire to see him become a medical doctor. Saul talked about his mother's expectations for his career. He said that she "wanted me to stay in school, get good grades and apply for medical school and then become a doctor because when you come from Honduras you are an engineer or a doctor, there's no less." It seemed that although Saul wanted to stay in one place, the fast-paced nature of his business dealings, it seemed that he was always pulled away from his studies. He explained that he also worked part time as a home-care medical assistant, and so often chatted with older, white Nebraskans to understand how they earned their money and property. He describes visiting the homes of elderly individuals

across a small urban setting, and the desire to soak up all the information he can from his clients. Thus, Saul shares an immense value of experiential knowledge, perceptions of endless opportunity and social mobility, and big dreams of business success.

Themes in narratives

Educational and career aspirations

The aspirations of David and Saul were dramatically different. David's aspirations were centered on his desire to be an auto mechanic. He arrived at this career goal via his perceptions that (1) a bachelor's degree was simply out of reach due to financial reasons and (2) this vocation was the closest thing to a mechanical engineer. Both of these perceptions seem born of his lower socioeconomic status as well as his somewhat limited understanding of potential career pathways that would allow him to draw on his mechanical-oriented interests. David stated, "...I would like to be a higher-level mechanic or if I can start my own mechanic shop and start building them, my own garage." He felt that his educational options were limited due to his background but communicated that, ultimately, providing for his family was of paramount importance in deciding on a career that would allow him to stay close to his community.

While David's aspirations were narrow, Saul's aspirations were incredibly broad. He wanted his career goals to align with his educational pursuits at the community college, but work and school did not seem to line up. He was taking business classes while working in the medical field. He worked for an advertising agency while pursuing a nursing degree. His goals were a bit scattered and he did not seem to have a sense of how to reconcile his mother's influence on his desire to work in the medical field with his family's business pursuits that fueled his passion for entrepreneurial. He stated:

> I went to school because my mom wanted me to become a doctor or nurse. I picked up nursing, went for science but when I lived in Lincoln I saw the bigger picture of business. So, that's when I dropped out and I'm like, 'What if I work for you and we bring it bigger.' And then when I started, I did nursing here in town and I still do. That's when I started

> meeting these really successful people. Then I went back to school, learned and when I got what I needed I dropped out or I'll take a class here and there.

He explained that anything less than a medical doctor, for his mother, was out of the question. Saul said, "she wants a doctor degree." Thus, Saul's aspirations were at times unclear but always informed by his family expectations and his perception that through his entrepreneurial spirit, he could not only become wealthy but also "help people" in the process.

Salience of race and immigrant generation in the Great Plains

A major theme that emerged from both narratives was how differently the two men talked about race and racism. In light of his many negative experiences with racist nativism, David described "race" as a problem in his rural community. He described in a matter-of-fact way that he and his community were at the mercy of whites, who sometimes mistreated Latino laborers. For example, he pointed (in a disjointed way) to what seemed like recent and distance instances in which a whites threatened Latino laborers with deportation and violence. He stated:

> There's a manager at this ranch and there's truckers that drive. He has his kid wandering around there and he's not supposed to and the kid gets in the way of things so the guy has to move. He told them to leave their kids alone. If they're in the way you have to stop doing everything or he'll shoot you. One of the Latinos he knows English he said, "You do know for what you said I can take you to court and get you fired." Then he walked away acting like he didn't hear anything. We can't really get him fired because if we get him fired then he calls immigration then everybody gets fired from the community. This happened when I was an eighth grader this sort of thing happened. One of the office ladies was very rude to everybody and they finally, the main owner of the company came and fired her. She was so pissed off because he came down personally in his own helicopter. The guy my dad works for is very wealthy. He came down personally and fired her. She got so angry she called immigration and got everybody fired just to get even with the company.

Here, David describes an instance in which a Latino laborer objected to allowing children to play in an area where they (the Latino laborers) were working. A white landowner threatened to shoot him. He then seems to mention that a white woman threatened deportation within his "dad's company." David switches back and forth between both stories and they sometimes blended together as he became more emotional. Whereas details were hard to follow, what was clear was the sheer amount of fear and vulnerability that David felt for himself and his family. Such experiences highlight how both racism and vulnerabilities resulting from undocumented status intertwined; both race and immigrant generation informed unequal power relations between his Latino/a/x community and white employers and landowners.

Meanwhile, race and racism seemed less salient for Saul. He, instead, seemed to typify the expectations for upward mobility and hopes of achieving the American dream that are often associated with second generation, children of immigrant parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Though he faces challenges associated with enrolling and stopping out of community college and lack of a clarity in his career goals, Saul casts himself as resilient, driven, and blessed with success. He very much looks to white ways and norms of success as a mold and way forward. He is unquestioning of the consequences of power differentials in society on the basis of race, class, or generational status. Rather, he expressed how he simply works past any issues that do arise and believes that he can and will work hard enough to become a wealthy entrepreneur.

As he works in his family's clothing business and part time in the medical field, he describes his many varied interactions with both clothing vendors and elderly patients. He explains that he asks elderly Nebraskans whose homes he visits to provide medical care how they earned their money, how they made it. He describes listening intently so that he can learn from them. He speaks of them as knowing the way and providing great insight. He recognizes racism in other areas (business, a few instances at college) but focuses his efforts on doing anything and everything that he believes will lend itself to making money and establish him as a business man. Thus, while David is vulnerable by the social and economic conditions of his rural environment, Saul seems to flutter around a more urban environment where he sees endless potential for upward mobility.

Discussion

This study sought to examine—in a nuanced way that centered lived experiences of Latino males—the ways in which race and immigrant generation informed students' experiences in Great Plains community colleges. The narratives of Saul and David both importantly highlight the inextricable connection between race and immigrant generation in shaping educational aspirations and career-decision making. Yet, the subjective experience of race and immigrant generation were profoundly different between the men. David was hyper-aware that he was especially vulnerable in his rural environment and college campus. He was resigned to experience economic exploitation and, it seemed, that his high aspirations faded in light of economic and social realities he faced. Saul, on the other hand, rejected limitations on the basis of race and affirmed that he had potential to overcome any obstacles on his path to becoming upwardly mobile. Saul's aspirations and career decision-making seemed to be informed by his mother's expectations and his own aspirations to be wealthy. Though endlessly hopeful, he was enrolled inconsistently and did not seem to be establishing connection with institutional agents or affiliation with any particular major or program in the community college. Thus, both Saul and David' narratives highlight the complexities of support for a heterogeneous Latino male population with varying subjective experiences with and meaning making of race, racism, and immigrant generation.

Implications for research and practice

There are a number of implications for research and practice that emerge in light of the narratives presented. For one, researchers should begin to consider different regional contexts that shape the experiences and outcomes of Latino community college contexts. Researchers have only begun to scratch the surface of uncovering disparities in enrollment, completion, transfer, and other outcomes across various geographic settings (Hatch et al., 2016; Zerquera & Gross, 2017). This is especially troubling because it prevents educational leaders from understanding proportionate disadvantage of Latinos relative to their population size in a given context (Hatch et al., 2016). As the Latino enrollments grow, and so too does a focus on this population in higher

education research, it is crucial to have a localized and broader understanding of educational disparity for this population.

Secondly, the narratives presented bring to light questions about the role that counselors and advisors could have played in both David and Saul's experiences. It seems that in David's case, a trusted counselor or advisor could have relayed information that could have helped clarify both options for financial supports as well as the huge difference between being a *mechanic* and a *mechanical engineer*. Similarly, a supportive institutional agent might have guided Saul toward a greater focus on either his business or medical field aspirations. With guidance, he might have understood better the ways in which to combine or pursue separately these two fields of study. That he continued to enroll, stop out, and then re-enroll was evidence that he had the drive, motivation, and ambition to succeed, but that these energies were perhaps misguided. These "types" of students – those with goals but not a clear and directed path on how to reach them – are precisely what make community college retention and persistence challenging. Yet, it is critical to not put the onus on students for not knowing this information but to explore ways to supportively untangle and direct these aspirations.

The significance of the political context under which this study was conducted cannot be understated. That is, the phenomenon under study was the ways in which the intersection of race and immigrant generation shaped educational and career aspirations at a time of heighted racial tensions and anti-immigrant rhetoric brought to light by the election of President Donald Trump. Students were asked to talk about their goals amidst a 24-h new cycle filled with racist nativist sentiments (Pérez Huber, 2016) that, as David pointed out, trickled down to his rural community. His narrative points to a stark power imbalance between a white majority and a Latino (predominantly immigrant) community he lives in. His experience in this context brings to light questions about equitable educational access, if not questions of civil rights violations. It is in this context that he attends a rural community college. Community college leaders, policy-makers, practitioners, and educators must consider the ways in which the current climate – where political and social norms are undergoing shifts toward greater xenophobia, new expressions of white nationalism, and growing tolerance for autocratic rule that reinforces the power derived from huge wealth

disparities – it is especially useful to critically assess postsecondary opportunity for vulnerable student populations, particularly in rural areas that might be more isolated than urban environments.

Conclusion

This study employed narrative inquiry to explore and document the lived experiences of Latino males living in the Great Plains. By centralizing the lived experiences of David and Saul, we shed light on the ways in which race and immigrant generation, viewed through the lens of LatCRT and *racist nativism*, inform their educational and career aspirations in the community college. We found that, although the men had vastly different experiences, both made meaning of race in ways that challenge depictions of Latinos as a heterogeneous population. Both cultivated persistent toward their educational and career goals by drawing on their families and communities. Such narratives are powerful tools that can be leveraged to promote more equitable educational experiences and outcomes for Latino males and other racially minoritized populations in the "flyover states."

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