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2. Latinas in Single-Sex Schools: An Historical Overview
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2. Latinas in Single-Sex Schools

An Historical Overview

ROSALINA DIAZ

In 1493, Christopher Columbus wrote to Queen Isabella of a group of women he had encountered while sailing in Caribbean waters. He referred to these women as Amazons, "These are the women who alone inhabit the island of Mateunin (or Matinino). These women, moreover, perform no kind of work of their sex, for they use bows and darts, like those I have described; they protect themselves with sheets of copper, of which there is a great abundance among them." The native men were said to avoid these women at all costs. For it was said that if any approached them *outside the agreed upon time*, or dared to follow them, they would "defend themselves with well-aimed arrows—believed to be shot with an expert eye." Columbus had learned of these women from the natives, but he had ample reason to believe their stories. There are several historical accounts of attacks on Columbus and his crew. Fernando Colon writes of one attack in which "the arrow, shot with such force and dexterity as to pass right through the shield was fired by . . . a woman." And in another account it was reported that these warrior "women so fiercely held off the landing parties that cannons were fired to frighten them off." Columbus searched in vain for the island of Matinino with no success. Later, historians would claim that the island never existed and that the story of the Amazon of Matinino was a myth. But then what of the attacks?

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Several members of Columbus' crew, including Michel de Cuneo, Dr. Chanca, and Fernando Colon corroborated the accounts.

Based on the combined accounts of Bartolome de las Casas, Gonzalo Oviedo de Fernandez, and Ramon Pane, we know that young girls in the Caribbean were isolated from their villages during their liminal phase of development, beginning around the ages of 12 and 13, right after first menstruation, and lasting for approximately two years. These young women were "off limits" to all men during that period of time. It is quite possible that the 'Amazons' that Columbus encountered were actually Native adolescent girls undergoing their rites of passage. Once the predetermined period of isolation and gender role socialization was completed, the girls were reintroduced into their society with a ritual celebration, but were restricted from all sexual activity until they were to be married. One of these celebrations is described by Oviedo in his *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, "More than 300 unmarried maidens danced, all god-daughters of Anacaona (female Taíno Chieftain), and she did not allow any woman or man who was sexually experienced to participate in the dance."[1] The period of European colonization in the Caribbean was perforce one of chaos and cultural disruption. Many traditions and cultural practices were irrevocably lost. Fortunately, as a result of Spain's assimilationist colonizing practices, concubinage with native women was widespread. It was through these women that aspects of the indigenous culture survived and were passed down from generation to generation. One aspect of indigenous culture that survived up to the twentieth century was single-sex education for girls.

The Spanish church implemented formal education in Puerto Rico in the early sixteenth century. These early schools were for boys only. There were no educational resources for girls until the nineteenth century. And then, only those families, who could afford it, sent their daughters to same-sex private or parochial schools, "Lessons for girls usually included sewing and embroidery. Boys and girls were taught separately by teachers of the same sex."[2] By 1897, the 551 public schools on the island were still very poorly funded by the colonial government, and were likewise segregated by gender. Of these schools, "nearly three-quarters (403) were attended by boys and the remaining (148) were used to teach girls. As a result of the Spanish American War, Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States in 1898. One might have reasonably expected the United States to immediately implement a coeducational system, such as was the norm on the mainland. This however was not the case. Instead the United States opened 34 new single-sex vocational schools, which continued the training in the traditional skills of embroidery and needlework that Puerto Rican girls learned in the home. The needlework industry soon became the second most important industry on the island, with American-owned businesses profiting from the labor of Puerto Rican women.[3] This delayed the introduction of coeducation in Puerto Rico until well into the twenty-first century.

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Transnational Feminisms: Expanding Our Notions of Feminist Identity

In the majority of Latino homes, family care-giving responsibilities fall primarily on girls. It is understood that a woman's obligation to her family is central to her identity as a Latina woman, and it supercedes any educational and/or career plans. Today, post-revolutionary Cuba has the highest literacy rate (96.8%) of any Latin American country and one of the highest in the world. Education is mandatory and free. Over 50% of college graduates and 60% of all doctors in Cuba are women.[4] Havana even boasts a Museum of Education. But in spite of high educational levels and a socialist political system which promotes more egalitarian and stable gender relations, Cuban women still perceive their fundamental role as mother and housewife. Teen pregnancy rates are high today, as they have always been. The average Cuban girl becomes sexually active at 13, and has her first baby by the age of 18. The rate of illiteracy in Santo Domingo is the highest in the Spanish speaking Caribbean. The literacy rate in 2001 was 84% for both men and women. Less than half of all Dominican children go beyond elementary school. Secondary schools begin at age 13, and only 40.8% of the population attends.[5] Most institutions are religious and many are still gender segregated. Public secondary education suffers from poor facilities and inadequate funding. The Dominican Republic is still largely a male-oriented society based on the values of paternalism and machismo. Female children are closely chaperoned and their lives are heavily circumscribed. Brothers and male cousins are expected to protect them and their reputations, and those middle-class and elite parents, who can, prefer to send their daughters to private or parochial same-sex schools. The average Dominican girl sets up her first home by the age of 14 or15, many while they are pregnant or already have children. However, Dominican women still tend to attain higher educational levels than men. In 1997 (most recent available data), 27.1% of females attended college, as opposed to 19.2% of males.[6]

Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic share a common cultural heritage rooted in Spanish colonialism, Catholicism, and a plantation economy. All were subjects of US hegemony, but followed quite different patterns of industrialization after World War II. In spite of differences in economic and political structures and ideologies, all have experienced significant increases in women's education and employment rates since the 1960s, in most cases surpassing that of the male population. Researcher and anthropologist Helen Safa identifies a common thread which differentiates Latin women's participation in the labor force from that of American women. She explains,"families provide women with a social identity that proletarianization as wageworkers has not diminished. Despite women's increasing incorporation into the labor force, they still define gender roles differently . . . Women view themselves as wives and mothers with economic responsibilities; . . . In fact, most women in our sample now consider paid employment part of their domestic role, because they are working to contribute to the household economy rather than for their own self-esteem or personal autonomy." Whereas for American women, "The decreasing importance placed by society on the family and housework undermined their value for women . . . women demanded a

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greater presence in the public sphere and began to claim individual rights based on equality with men and not simply on the basis of protecting women's separate domestic sphere."[7]

One reason for this difference is the importance attributed to the role of the mother in Latin American society. The Spanish-speaking Caribbean has historically been based on a matrifocal system, with an emphasis on complementary gender relations. Taking care of the family is seen as a sacred trust, and the status and respect afforded women in this role can be highly rewarding and satisfying. The mother is the acknowledged and unchallenged authority within the home, and her labor contributions in this sphere are considered of far greater importance than that of her male partner. For Latinas, contemporary attempts at gender equality have largely been an effort to expand on this role and extend it into the public sphere. Latinas, like their African American counterparts in the states, see little need to compete with male partners who have been even more disenfranchised by the dominant society than they themselves have. The persistence of elopement and consensual unions, especially in the lower classes, reflect resistance to interference from patriarchal/colonialist Church and State institutions into the private realm of conjugal relations.[8] These more indigenous marriage patterns have benefited women in that they allow them to maintain control over the home and children in the event of dissolution of the relationship. Ignorance, regarding the historical and social structures of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, has contributed to a general belief that these women are passive/submissive victims of a misogynist Macho society, and completely disregards the fact that Machismo and Marianismo are European imports. Single-sex education in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean was grounded in a legacy of female empowerment and strength, and though it has gone through several transmutations, it continues to be a source of both feminine empowerment and respect for cultural tradition. To ignore the history of the development of single-sex education in the Caribbean is to omit information vital to a true understanding of how and why single-sex education works for Caribbean Latinas.

Caribbean Latinas living in the United States today are considered among the most educationally disadvantaged groups in the United States. According to The Urban Institute Education Policy Center, the graduation rates for Latinas in New York City were just above 30% in 2002 as opposed to 94.6% in Puerto Rico. Sadly, these statistics are neither new nor surprising. Latino students have had the lowest graduation rates in the United States for almost 30 years. Clearly, American schools have not been meeting the needs of the majority of Latino students. In light of these dismal statistics, concerned Latino parents consistently seek out a more culturally familiar option for their adolescent daughters—schools that offer the structure, discipline, and safety more typical of the Latino single-sex schools back in their native lands.

Latinas in American Single-Sex Schools: A Matter of Class

Single-sex education in the United States has always been segregated by race/ethnicity and class. The Life Adjustment movement of the 1940s and 1950s encouraged the tracking of

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many Latino students into single-sex vocational schools. Schools like Eli Whitney, Norman Thomas, Sarah J. Hale, Clara Barton, Mabel Dean Bacon, Washington Irving, and Fashion Industries High School offered Latina girls and their parents the option of a career oriented school in a single-sex environment. These schools reflected the traditional single-sex manual training programs (i.e., needlepoint and dress-making) that had been an integral part of the educational system in Latin America for girls over the age of 13 for centuries.[9] The New York City High School Division reports that in June of 1962, 24.7% of single-sex vocational school graduates were Puerto Rican as opposed to only 4.5% in academic high schools. New York City vocational high schools were coeducationalized by the 1980s, as a result of Title IX and increasing pressure from the Office of Civil Rights to "provide an educational environment that mirrored the diversity of modern society."[10] Washington Irving High School was the last to convert (1986), in spite of an excellent academic record (85%–90% of its graduates went on to post-secondary education) and vehement protests by parents and students. The tracking of Latinas into low-wage manual labor encouraged by these schools was problematic, but the loss of these single-sex institutions has been strongly felt by the Latino community, and has not resulted in superior or more equitable options. Today many Latino parents opt to send their daughters to single-sex private or parochial schools. However, given the socio-economic status of most Latinos, these numbers are in the minority and most Latino parents have no choice but to enroll their daughters in coeducational public high schools. With the closing of large numbers of New York City Catholic schools in 2005, the choices are now even more limited.

Four years ago, a new option for Latinas emerged in the midst of Spanish Harlem, The Young Women's Leadership School (TYWLS), a public school that offers Latino parents the best of all worlds—academic rigor, a single-sex environment, in a public school setting. The school was founded in 1996 by Ann Rubenstein Tisch (a noted journalist and philanthropist). According to an article in the *Daily News* by Diane Ravitch, "Ms. Ann Tisch wanted an all-girls school because she knew that the dropout rate among Hispanic and African American students was high and that many minority girls left school because they became pregnant. She wanted to create a girl's school because she believed that minority girls would focus on their academic work more if they were not distracted by the presence of boys." Even though her statements reflect a limited and essentialist understanding of the complex socio-economic factors that underscore the dropout problem, her solution seems to have been right on target. The Young Women's Leadership Academy has apparently been very successful and is now considered a role model for other same-sex institutions. The 2002 graduating class numbered 232, over 91% of its original cohort. Of these girls a total of 97% went on to college, in comparison to the City's average of 65%.[11] The success of this school has prompted the opening of several single-sex schools in New York City. It has also prompted rigorous debate and discussion. Proponents of same-sex education include such philosophically opposed parties as Diane Ravitch and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Opponents are equally powerful, and include the National Organization for Women, the American Association of University Women, and the American Civil Liberties Union Part of the rea-

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son for the controversy is that many of the benefits of Single-sex education, increased self-esteem, development of leadership qualities, increased opportunity for same-sex bonding, are very difficult to measure quantitatively. In addition, because the students in single-sex schools are a self-selected population, it is difficult to ascertain whether the benefits are attributed to a same-sex education or simply to the quality of the students. " . . . Researchers do not know for certain whether the benefits derive from factors unique to single-sex programs, or whether these factors also exist or can be reproduced in coeducational settings. Studies or anecdotes suggesting a correlation between same-sex programs and positive educational outcomes have no meaning unless an effort was made to control for variables such as socioeconomic status of the students, selectivity of admissions, greater resources invested in the program, and smaller class size. Indeed, without controlling for those variables, one could make the case for separating students based on any identity characteristic."[12] In response to this challenge, there has been extensive research on the academic benefits of a single-sex education for the general population,[13] but the research on the benefits of single-sex education for specific ethnic/racial groups, such as Latinas, is practically non-existent. The study of single-sex education for Latinas is very complex, as it must take into account gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic and cultural factors as these intersect in an educational setting.

Latinas in Single-Sex Schools: What Does the Research Say?

There has been a growing body of literature which addresses the cultural conflicts encountered by adolescent Latinas in traditional American public high schools and their possible correlation to increased dropout rates.[14] Most deal with the conflicts and problems encountered by first and second generation immigrant Latinas, but the reality is that newly arrived immigrants fare far better in the public school system than do later generation Latinos. In fact Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, who have the longest history of residence in the United States, also have the highest dropout rates among Latino groups. Although these works specifically address the cultural conflicts Latinas face in Public High Schools, most hesitate to take the logical next step of suggesting solutions in the form of culturally sensitive community-based models of education. They acknowledge the problem but place the onus for change (adaptation, acculturation, or assimilation) on the student or cultural group and not on the school system. Based on this existing literature, I have identified the following causal factors as those most often used to explain the high dropout rate among Latinas (all refer to cultural factors). Of these only Sonia Nieto (2000) clearly places the fault on the school system itself.

- High pregnancy rates—Latina girls have the highest birth rate in the nation (US Department of Health and Human Services). In 2001, the birth rate (per thousand) for Hispanic girls aged 15–19 was 92.4, compared to 73.1 for black girls, and 41.7 for white, and are much more likely to leave school as a result. "Latinas in this coun-

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try come from areas where teenagers often marry and bear children as their primary (or only) rite of passage to adulthood, and the status associated with these events is highly rewarding."[15] Latina girls are less likely to return to school after giving birth than African American or White girls. Latin tradition dictates that they marry and take on the responsibility of raising their families regardless of age, and abortion is rarely an option. In all Latino homes, family care-giving responsibilities fall primarily on girls. It is understood that a woman's obligation to her family is central to her identity as a Latina woman, and supercedes any educational and/or career plans.[16]

- Conflicting cultural messages regarding appropriate behavior, values, and morals from the family/home culture and the school culture.[17] Traditional coeducational schools do not make the psychological/emotional connections with students that Latino students are accustomed to. "Though inclusive of formal academic training, 'educacion' additionally refers to competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others."[18] Traditional Latino teachers' expectations of students tend to focus strongly on the notion of respect, discipline, and social responsibility, which are often lacking in traditional coeducational public high schools.
- On average, Latina girls come from homes with lower socioeconomic status (SES). Overall, New York Latino families have lower household incomes than either African American or white families and consequently suffer higher poverty rates . . . well over one-third of Puerto Rican and Dominican families, live in poverty."[19] This translates into greater responsibilities in the home from household duties to childcare to possible part-time employment outside the home, which may interfere with schooling, and girls "charged with the maintenance of family ties" tend to shoulder more of these responsibilities.[20]
- Internalization of negative societal stereotypes regarding inborn-intelligence, and incapacity to succeed.[21] In spite of the fact that statistics have consistently found that quality education is a top priority for Latino families and youth,[22] the stereotype of educationally unmotivated Latinos has taken firm hold in the American imagination. Suarez-Orozco in the book, *Children of Immigration*, blames "misrecognition," a process by which children internalize negative societal stereotypes, for the poor academic performance of Latinos. She explains, "The hopelessness and self-deprecation that this resignation causes may in turn result in low aspirations and self-defeating behaviors," such as dropping out.
- School policies and practices that alienate Latino students. Latino students in the United States struggle to maintain their identity in the face of on-going pressures to assimilate and abandon their cultural diversity. A "1976 report by the US Commission on Civil Rights found that a primary reason for dropping out of school as identified by young people themselves was school's unresponsiveness to their cultural backgrounds."[23]

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To date only a handful of scholars/researchers have looked to a single-sex education as a possible solution to the problem of Latina and African American "dropoutism." In the 1980s, Cornelius Riordan of Rhode Island College, and Valerie Lee of the University of Michigan, conducted research studies on single-sex education. As a result of the dearth of public single-sex schools, these studies focused on Catholic School populations. Both studies showed that there were definite benefits to single-sex education for girls, which included "higher educational aspirations, plans for post-secondary and graduate school education, and entry into less stereotypically female fields."[24] Several years later, Lee conducted similar research focusing on independent private schools. The results perplexed her, as they were not consistent with the results of her first study. In fact this research seemed to indicate that there were no substantial benefits to be gained from single-sex schools either for boys or girls. As a result of this new data, Lee apparently abandoned her advocacy of single-sex schools. She has instead focused her research on identifying those characteristics of Catholic single-sex schools responsible for the initial success rates she encountered, with the end goal of replicating these characteristics in coeducational settings. Cornelius Riordan, on the other hand was not dismayed by the results of this second study. Riordan analyzed the data and explained that the results were actually predictable. Catholic School students, he explains, tend to come from working class minority families, whereas private school students tend to be elite whites. This difference accounts for the skewed results. Riordan went on to explain that single-sex schools only worked for historically disadvantaged groups. "They work for girls and boys, women and men, whites and non-white, but this effect is limited to students of lower socioeconomic status and/or students who are disadvantaged historically—females and racial/ethnic/religious minorities. The major factor that conditions the strength of single-sex effects is social class, and since class and race are inextricably linked, the effects are also conditioned by race and gender."[25] Unlike Lee, Riordan does not believe that the success of single-sex schools can be replicated in coeducational school settings. He explains that the "organizational differences" that Lee describes in her research, "more successful same-sex teacher and student role models, more leadership opportunities, greater order and discipline, and fewer distractions from academic matters," are set into motion because of an independent variable, which is single-sex education. He adds, "Single-sex schools provide an *atmosphere* that 'empowers' African and Hispanic American students." These words echo those of Elizabeth Tidball, who in her 1970s study on women's colleges suggested that it was the "wholeness of the environment" which accounted for the success of same-sex institutions.[26] Riordan's work has been immensely important to the study of single-sex schooling. However, by positing that same-sex education benefits Latinas mainly because of their low SES, he implicitly denies the role of culture. Riordan never once references the long history of single-sex education in Latin America and the obvious correlation that this history would have on present-day educational practices. Riordan's oversight is typical of the decontextualized research practices prevalent among quantitative scholars. This decontextualizd type of study can only lead to the further essentializing of already stigmatized groups.

Building on the work of Riordan, Karen Stabiner, a journalist, writes a moving compar-

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ative ethnography of two single-sex schools in her book, *All Girls: Single-Sex Education and Why It Matters*. The book, clearly written for a mainstream audience, follows two separate groups of students for a year—one from TYWLS and the other from Marlborough, an elite prep school in Los Angeles. Stabiner attempts to take us into the minds of these students, their struggles, and their triumphs, as well as the critical role that economics plays in determining the future destinies of these girls. It is also evident from her descriptions that she perceives single-sex education (SSE) for both groups to be a positive and viable educational option. However, like Riordan, Stabiner dances around the issue of race/ethnicity and culture without ever directly addressing it. A lexical analysis of her word choices reveals cultural biases. She includes her own perception that the girls at TYWLS "were *embarrassed* by what they saw as their cultural heritage." And she quotes one teacher who explains to the students "culture is a group of people's unique way of life." She adds as an aside to this, "It was not, as some girls assumed, their *destiny*." The then principal of the school Celenia Chevere is quoted repeatedly and excessively. "It was part of Celenia Chevere's plan to *separate* her girls from the people they pass on the way to school. The girl at the coffee cart and her boyfriend represented to her a *pervasive threat* . . . She made it clear from the start that *escape* demanded something more than the obvious attributes of dedication and academic excellence. A successful young woman made TWYLS her community, and *left the temptations* of her neighborhood behind." The implication here is that success for minority girls can only be attained at the cost of culture and community, but this is not the case at Marlborough where the family and community are considered important social capital. "Most of the girls at Marlborough considered a good education their birthright; their parents, and many of their grandparents, were college graduates. It was one of the perquisites of a comfortable existence, along with travel, access to cultural events, lessons, and sports." She presents the school experiences and outcomes of both sets of students in a completely de-contextualized fashion, without ever confronting the social, historical, and political reasons behind the apparent inequalities in their lives. This process of de-contextualization and mystification leaves one with the feeling that this is just the way things are, and may, in many cases, lead the public to believe that it is just a matter of individual or group merit. She ends the book with the following quote. "Why should Diana Perez miss what the Rich girls had? No reason at all." Really?

In this same vein, Rosemary Salomone of St. John's Law school (legal advisor to Rubinstein Tisch—founder of TYWLS) also advocates for single-sex schools for minority groups in a book entitled *Same, Different, Equal*. She presents a reasoned well thought-out legal and historical analysis of single-sex education in which she is careful to point out the dangers of essentialism. Unfortunately her own seemingly unbiased narrative falls apart in her revealing descriptions of the social issues affecting Latinas.

> Viewing life through the lens of *few available options*, they (Latinas) perceive their economic and social situations as *hopeless* and resort to *early and repeat motherhood* as a source of competence and significance. Unfortunately, they soon learn the realities of raising children on their own without the emotional and financial support of a husband . . . The impact [of *early marriage and pregnancies*] on their

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future lives proves *devastating* . . . for many girls, physical, sexual, and emotional *victimization* is the first step along the path leading to the *juvenile justice system*. A high proportion of them enter as runaways, seeking to escape *abusive homes*.[27]

By essentializing Latinas and minority girls as victims or future delinquents, Salomone paves the way for her defense of the cultural intervention of TYWLS—a school founded by a white upper-class woman from outside the community. This argument, as well as both Tisch's and Salomone's obsession with the excessively high pregnancy rates of minority girls, is reminiscent of the reproductive interventionist strategies associated with Operation Bootstrap in the 1960s. The poor in ghetto neighborhoods were seen as in need of supervision due to their "proclivity for immediate gratification and inability to plan for the future." This argument justified interventionist practices that ultimately led to massive sterilizations (35% of all Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age) and the largest percentage of births by c-section in the world.[28]

Salomone goes on to describe TYWLS in relation to its host community—Spanish Harlem, which she describes as a "beleaguered community" with "graffiti lined streets." TWYLS, on the other hand, is described as "an oasis of excellence and hope in a desert of poverty, crime, and despair," "a striking contrast with the surrounding neighborhood . . . a safe haven for these girls," a "ticket out of the sub-culture," "a place that is orderly and secure with a palpable sense of energy and purpose" as opposed to the surrounding neighborhood. Underlying this form of discourse is what Henry Giroux calls "cultural deprivation/deficit theory." "In this ideology of 'need fulfillment,' the category of need represents an *absence* of a particular set of experiences. In most cases, what educators determine as missing are either the culturally specific experiences that school authorities believe students must acquire in order to enrich the quality of their lives, or the fundamental skills they will "need' in order to get jobs once they leave school." Underlying this view of experience is the logic of cultural deprivation theory, which defines education in terms of cultural enrichment, remediation, and basics . . . Specifically, the experience of the student as 'other' is cast as deviant, underprivileged, or 'uncultured.' Consequently not only do students bear the sole responsibility for school failure, but also, there is little room for questioning the ways in which administrators and teachers actually create and sustain the problems they attribute to students."[29] In other words, by using language that focuses on the deficits of the cultural group, the school can justify a culture-blind curriculum that reinforces negative stereotypes about the student's home culture. Conversely the overarching socio-historical context is ignored and the dominant society (represented by the school) is presented as benefactor and savior.

At TYWLS, this attitude is evident in the lack of representations of Latino culture in the school and in the curriculum, the lack of school involvement in the family and community life of the students, and the lack of Latino faculty and staff. The question here is, does this absence of cultural representation in the schools adversely affect Latinas? The answer to this is subjective and would have to take into account differing interpretations of success. Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* states:

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> No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunate and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example. Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressor (an egoism) cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism and makes of the oppressed objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization.[30]

The efforts of all external educational, social, and political programs, no matter, how well-intentioned are problematic and suspect, unless they begin as a collaborative effort with the community in question. Such an effort would strive to identify the actual needs of the residents of that community and not their own preconceived assumptions of those needs.

Diane Pollard of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, conducted a research study at an Afro-centric single-sex after-school program in a middle school in Baltimore that attempted to do just that. Her reflections on this study were published in an AAUW journal, "Separated by sex: A critical look at single-sex education for girls." In Pollard's own words, "The impetus for this program and study was the need for broader attempts to implement *culturally* centered educational models. In this context single-sex classes have focused on both formal and informal socialization for boys and girls." The program was aptly named "Rites of passage." This program offered young African American students of both sexes the opportunity to focus on gender issues in an environment that was culturally supportive, nurturing, and even enhancing. The underlying tenet of African-centered education is that schools serving African American children need to be closely *linked* with the communities of their students, and should *build upon and reinforce* the cultural activities of those communities. This orientation suggests that these schools should not be limited to an academic focus, but should also concern themselves with social and personal development. Furthermore this orientation emphasizes the notion that students are expected to use education not only for individual empowerment but also for the promotion and *empowerment of their communities*. Pollard argues that gender issues within minority communities need to take into account the *historical and cultural aspects* of that community, as gender identity and relations are shaped by cultural heritage, colonization, and imperialistic exploitations. Issues related to gender cannot be separated from issues of class and race. Pollard's study emphasizes the need for education that builds on the strengths that minority students, both male and female, bring with them from their home communities. This issue begs for more research that focuses on the intersections of race/ethnicity, culture, and class as these intersect and play themselves out in a single-sex environment.

The literature I have here compiled represents diverse views on the goals of SSE for Latina girls. Riordan's de-contextualized research on parochial single-sex schools repeatedly conflates issues of economics and race/ethnicity. This proves problematic, as it omits other aspects of the historical/cultural development of gender that are crucial to a complete understanding of the significance of SSE in Latin culture. Stabiner and Salomone both present "cultural deficit models" to justify their advocacy of a specific type of SSE, specifically TYWLS, for Latinas. Lexical selections show the "familiar form of negative other presentations, and positive self-presentation" and constructs Latinas as needy and disadvantaged. Diane

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Pollard's study introduces a new and alternative brand of SSE.[31] This SSE has emerged as a result of a need expressed by a marginalized community. As a result, according to Pollard, it respects and builds upon the culture of the students and takes into account the socio-historical factors underlying the social realities of their community. The students are presented as active agents with a stake in their own educational processes.

Conclusion: Some Crucial Questions

The United States has a long historical tradition of coeducation. The father of progressive education, John Dewey, argued for equal coeducation as the ideal for a truly democratic society. He believed that separate could never be equal, and he sincerely aspired to full educational equality for women. Unfortunately, studies and statistics have shown that in the case of gender, coeducation does not guarantee equality. Title IX was flawed in that it offered an educational solution to a problem that is societal and cannot be fully resolved within the schools. Until women achieve full equality in American society, schools will continue to replicate these biases and inequalities within our coeducational classrooms.

Single-sex schools offer an alternative that appeals to many parents. Latinas and African Americans in particular have been shown to benefit from this type of education.[32] With the recent popularity of single-sex schools in the United States, and their immense appeal to minority parents in NYC in particular, it is vital that we understand all the factors behind their success. Understanding the history of single-sex education in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean helps to explain this appeal. However, not all single-sex schools are created equally. Differing school philosophies and ideologies make for vastly different educational experiences. The philosophy/ideology of TYWLS, for example, is for the most part Eurocentric, feminist, and color/culture blind. This may not be what most Latino parents have in mind when they think of a single-sex education for their daughters. I would venture a guess that many of the girls (and families) who choose to come to this school do so because they too have incorporated a "cultural deficit model." They choose TYWLS because what this school promotes, full assimilation to American society, is exactly what they have been convinced they need to succeed. However, I do not believe that this is true for the majority of New York City Latino parents. For girls who are more firmly grounded in their Latina culture, this school can become a ground for contestation and identity conflicts.

Latinos are not unlike other immigrants in several important ways. The close geographical proximity of Latin America, and in the case of Puerto Ricans—dual citizenship, facilitates consistent back and forth travel or circular migration. The migrant population is thus consistently replenished, and it becomes necessary to maintain a dual cultural identity. "Deactivation" of the home culture dissolves support networks and erases valuable cultural capital. "Although assimilation has been rationalized by schools on many grounds, recent research on cultural and linguistic identity has challenged the long-standing wisdom that in order to get ahead on must sacrifice one's identity."[33] The research has shown that the

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more successful Latinas are those that learn to meld the two cultures into a "homogenous, bounded unitary, whole."[34] In addition, the history of the education of Latinos (as described by Nieto), particularly of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, in the United States has been one of struggle to maintain a bicultural and bilingual identity as both a "defense against a hostile environment and as a nonnegotiable demand for educational improvement."

And so there are several questions we must ask ourselves at this juncture. Why has the discourse on single-sex education resurfaced at this particular time in history? Who are the actors behind this resurgence? Why have Latinas been targeted? Who actually benefits from the legal changes that have emerged from the incorporation of single-sex education?

In a country where Latinos now represent the largest minority population and yet have consistently maintained the lowest educational achievement and economic levels, this research indicates that the curriculum of TWYLS and similar schools merely prepares a select handful of properly assimilated token Latinas for leadership positions in order to "quell discontent among the masses" (De Tocqueville, 1888). In other words, as now and the American civil liberties union (ACLU) have insinuated, TYWLS serves as a distraction to the injustices and educational inequities that confront the majority of Latino children of both genders on a daily basis and in fact, as the numbers show, benefit only a very small minority (recent statistics for TYWLS show a decrease in the graduation rate from 97% in 2002 to 85.7% in 2004, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores in both the verbal and math were lower on average than those in city schools and only 35% of 2004 graduates went on to four-year colleges as opposed to slightly over 50% of city school graduates).[35]

In spite of this, the No Child Left Behind Act included a bipartisan amendment sponsored by Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) and Hillary Clinton (D-New York), which called for single-sex schools and programs as one of twenty-seven "innovative Assistance Programs." In the spring of 2002, the Department of Education announced its intention to loosen Title IX guidelines to allow for single-sex education."[36] The result has been the opening of many more single-sex schools and programs across the country. Though I am an advocate of single-sex education, I do not believe this new brand of American feminist, culture-blind single-sex education can work for the general Latina population. However, with the recent popularity of single-sex schools in the United States, and their immense appeal to minority parents in NYC in particular, it is vital that we understand all the factors behind their success. If single-sex education has proved an effective method for countering the dropout rates of minority girls, then it is crucial that more research be done in this area, but in so doing we must be careful not to abandon our advocacy of culturally sensitive/relevant, student-centered, community-based education, which has likewise been proven successful in these same areas for the greater portion of our Latino students, of both genders.

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