EMPOWERING CHICANA/O AND LATINA/O HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

A qualitative research study was conducted with 15 school counselors to identify the strategies they used to empower Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students. The findings of this study revealed that participants facilitated student empowerment by developing personal relationships with students, involving alumni, building sociocultural awareness, and encouraging social action. Based on these findings, school counselors who seek to empower students are called to develop positive relationships, identify role models, and encourage community engagement.

mpowerment is a significant construct for youth of color, particularly Chicana/o and Latina/o students (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Feelings of empowerment are related to psychological well-being, academic engagement, and academic performance in youth of color (Molix & Bettencourt, 2010; Ozer & Schotland, 2011), all of which are vital constructs for the academic, career, and personal/social success of Chicana/o and Latina/o youth. Recognizing the positive outcomes associated with empowerment, theorists have called for empowerment theory to guide the work of school counselors (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007).

Despite the ample theory explaining empowerment, minimal attention has been given to the strategies necessary to facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students at the high school level. To address this gap in the literature and provide school counselors with specific tools for facilitating empowerment, the authors of this research study sought to understand the strategies used by school counselors to promote the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. The findings of this study can help school counselors operationalize empowerment practices by addressing the importance of rapport, positive role models, building sociocultural awareness, and encouraging community engagement.

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EMPOWERMENT THEORY AND THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Students and families who have struggled with decades of oppression and marginalization, such as the Chicana/o and Latina/o community, require more than what traditional school counseling theories offer—they need school counselors who are skilled in facilitating empowerment (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Furthermore, scholars have argued that school counselors can facilitate Chicana/o and Latina/o students' academic success through personal empowerment strategies (Aviles, Guerrero, Howarth, & Thomas, 1999; Dickson Zamora, Gonzalez, Chun, & Callaghan Leon, 2011; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Padilla, 2013; Stanon-Salazar, 2010). Supporting this point, Ozer and Schotland (2011) found that empowerment contributes to academic engagement and academic performance in youth. Stanton-Salazar (2010) asserted that, by drawing from empowerment theory, school counselors can assist students in navigating the educational arena by providing them with the tools and key resources to aid them in reaching their educational and career goals.

Empowerment theory is rooted in the educational theories of Paulo Freire. Freire emphasized the humanity of the oppressed and rejected the methods of education that serve to keep the oppressed submerged in a reality of passivity and unconscious of their potential as agents of social change (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005).

For the purposes of this study, the authors focused on how school counselors promote the personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o High School Students. Personal empowerment involves formulating several key ideas, including critical consciousness, positive identity, and taking social action (Carr, 2003; Gutierrez, 1995). Although a thorough exploration of empowerment theory is beyond the scope of this article, it briefly presents the empowerment process from a theoretical perspective.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is a likely first step in the process of personal empowerment, as the awareness of oppression is thought to inspire sociopolitical action (Carr, 2003; Tamanas, 2010). The development of critical conscious-

ness requires an understanding of how sociopolitical, cultural, and historical forces contribute to the oppression of marginalized communities (Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002). Further, critical consciousness entails the rejection of propaganda that diminishes perception of oppression (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007).

Gutierrez (1995) and Hanna, Talley, and Guindon (2000) argued that people from marginalized communities typically possess limited consciousness: sufficient for survival in an oppressive system, but not enough to recognize the systemic barriers that oppress them. To achieve critical consciousness, Hopper (1999) stated that marginalized communities must critically examine accepted ways of thinking to uncover hidden assumptions that perpetuate structural inequalities. To promote critical consciousness, Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) called for school counselors to aid youth from marginalized communities in examining their daily lives and the communities in which they live, so that youth can better understand how being a member of a marginalized group impacts their life experiences, political representation, and opportunities for advancement. The development of critical consciousness and the

awareness of oppression are thought to inspire the search for positive identity and, ultimately, social action to end oppression.

Positive Identity

To achieve personal empowerment, oppressed communities must create or discover personally relevant and empowering identities (Carr, 2003; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). In the United States, dominant discourse privileges "White, male, heterosexual, Judeo-Christian, able-bodied, upper SES identities" (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015, p. 4). As such, the identities of marginalized communities are often devalued or denied (Hansen, 1999; Molix & Bettencourt, 2010). Positive identity can take place across of dimensions of identity, including gender, race, sexual orientation, or other elements of social identity (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). This positive identity should instill pride in being a member of a community and should not be defined in reference to the dominant culture (Duran & Duran, 1995). The positive identity should inspire feelings of solidarity, shared culture, and collective efficacy (Gutierrez, 1995). The development of positive identity also should inspire action to liberate the oppressed community (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007).

Social Action

Although critical consciousness and positive identity are important steps toward personal empowerment, social action is a defining aspect of the process. This is because critical consciousness and positive identity are primarily psychological in nature and psychological change in the individual does not lead to the systemic change required

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> ## POSITIVE IDENTITY SHOULD INSTILL PRIDE IN BEING A MEMBER OF A COMMUNITY AND SHOULD NOT BE DEFINED IN REFERENCE TO THE DOMINANT CULTURE

for the liberation of marginalized communities (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Social action is also important as it relates to Freire's (1970) notion of praxis or theory-guided practice: Theory exists to influence practice and practice should be used to improve theory. Thus, critical consciousness and positive identity should guide social action and the lessons learned from social action should expand critical consciousness and enhance positive identity. Ultimately, the goal of social action is for members of oppressed communities to gain sociopolitical control of their lived reality (Gutierrez, 1995). Social action requires participation in individual and collective advocacy and activism—this might take the form of challenging social or institutional policies, participation in community and social advocacy groups, and engagement with electoral politics (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007).

FACILITATING PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

In the larger education and community psychology literature, researchers have identified supportive relationships, culturally and sociopolitically relevant curriculum, and critical conversations as tools for facilitating personal empowerment in youth. This section briefly reviews three interventions that seek to facilitate the empowerment of youth: supportive relationships, culturally and sociopolitically relevant pedagogy, and critical conversations.

Supportive Relationships
Youth of color who experience supportive relationships from adults and peers seem to experience increased

personal empowerment (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Tamanas (2010) found a direct relationship between personal empowerment and social support from peers, friends, and family. Furthermore, Ozer and Schotland (2011) found that youth with higher levels of personal empowerment reported caring relationships with adults and support from peers. Hipolito-Delgado and Zion (2015) argued that supportive relationships with teachers led youth to experience personal empowerment. Although supportive relationships alone are not likely to lead to personal empowerment, and the exact aspects of these relationships that facilitate personal empowerment remain unclear, positive relationships with adults and peers appear to be related to the personal empowerment of youth.

Culturally and Sociopolitically Relevant Pedagogy
Researchers have advocated for culturally and sociopolitically relevant pedagogy as educational approaches that facilitate personal empowerment. Watts et al. (2002) emphasized that psycho-educational groups that seek to foster personal empowerment should focus on the development of critical consciousness by examining issues that impact youth's sociopolitical circumstances and that youth should be encouraged to develop solutions to these issues. Chun and Dickson (2011) argued for the use of culturally responsive teaching and the integration of a cultural frame of reference in education; they contended that these methods lead Latina/o students to feel a sense of empowerment and pride and resulted in improved academic outcomes. Chun and Dickson's (2011) suggestion would appear to contribute to personal empowerment by promoting positive identity develop-

ment. Similarly, Potts (2003) called for educators working with students from marginalized communities to more accurately teach these students about their history and culture in hopes of promoting positive identity and fostering personally empowerment.

Critical Conversations
Engaging in critical conversations is an approach to fostering personal empowerment that requires participants to deal with challenging topics such as racism and oppression, and often calls for participants to push the boundaries of their comfort (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) called for issues of social inequities to be brought to the forefront of curriculum in order to promote the personal empowerment of marginalized youth, and Gutierrez (1995) described how participation in a consciousness raising group—that featured critical conversations—led to increases in the personal empowerment of participants. Further, Hipolito-Delgado and Zion (2015) argued that participation in critical conversation led marginalized youth to developing personal empowerment.

Despite the theoretical literature advocating for the use of empowerment theory to promote the educational success of Chicana/o and Latina/o students, the literature does not address how school counselors facilitate the personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. As such, school counselors might lack the tools to facilitate the personal empowerment of their students. Through this article, the authors aim to document the interventions used by high school counselors to promote the personal empowerment of their Chicana/o and Latina/o students.

METHOD

Ontology
In this study, the researcher (first author) was interested in gathering a deeper understanding of how school counselors promote the personal em-

TABLE 1 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Languages Spoken	Age Range	Years as a School Counselor
Arcelia	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	36-40	6-10
Diego	Male	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	31-35	2-5
Emiliano	Male	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	41-50	11-20
Lucha	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	23-30	6-10
Luz	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Some Spanish	51 and up	More than 21
Milagros	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	41-50	6-10
Noelia	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	23-30	2-5
Pancho	Male	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	41-50	11-20
Paulo	Male	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English	51 and up	More than 21
Selena	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	31-35	6-10
Sol	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English	36-40	11-20
Soledad	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	36-40	6-10
Valeria	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	41-50	11-20
Victoria	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	36-40	6-10
Yaneth	Female	Chicana/o and/or Latina/o	English, Spanish	23-30	2-5

powerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students. The researcher used a qualitative methodology to highlight participants' experiences in and techniques for facilitating the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. A qualitative perspective is also consistent with the researcher's worldview that humans generate and construct their own knowledge by making meaning of their social interactions (Creswell, 2013).

Methodology

The researcher implemented an in-depth interview methodological approach to gain rich, thick descriptions (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010) of the personal experiences of school counselors who facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o youth. He also chose to use in-depth interviews to minimize the hierarchy between the researcher and participants and to make the research process more collaborative (Patton, 2002; Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). Further, the use of qualitative inquiry allowed the researchers to examine the experiences of school counselors who seek to facilitate

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the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students (Creswell, 2013), and to describe in detail the strategies utilized by the school counselors in this study.

Recruitment

For this study, the researcher recruited participants using both purposeful and snowball sampling techniques (Maxwell, 2005). In purposeful sampling, the researcher intentionally selects individuals who can provide rich data about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). The researcher asked each participant in the study if they would recommend other school counselors who met the participation criteria and who could contribute to understanding of the phenomenon under investigation—this was the study's snowball sampling aspect.

These sampling procedures were best suited for this study as they allowed the researcher to highlight and provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how school counselors facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students.

Participants

The participation criteria for this study was as follows: (1) be or have been a high school counselor in an urban high school attended predominantly by Chicana/o and Latina/o students, (2) have 2 years or more of experience as a high school counselor, and (3) seek to promote personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. The researcher purposefully sought school counselors who were known (either through personal contacts or through refer-

TABLE 2 **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. Can you describe how you engage in activities or discussions with Chicana/o and Latina/o students regarding issues of oppression in their communities or schools? Describe these activities for me. Do these activities lead students to build socio-cultural awareness? Can you share these resources with me?

2. How do you engage Chicana/o and Latina/o students in activities or discussions aimed at fostering positive ethnic identity? What types of activities do you do to help facilitate positive ethnic identity development? Can you share these resources with me?

3. How do you encourage Chicana/o and Latina/o students to take an active role in participating in their schools and/or communities? What strategies do you take to facilitate that?

4. How do you encourage parents to take an active role in the educational lives of their students?

5. How do you collaborate with the larger community in any ways that you see that benefit Chicana/o and Latina/o students? What are some strategies to accomplish this? Do you have any resources you will be willing to share with me?

6. Describe for me how you advocate for Chicana/o and Latina/o students. What do these advocacy efforts look like?

7. What else do I need to know about how you facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students?

8. Is there a student that you have worked with that is empowered? If so, how did that student become empowered? What was that process like? What lessons are to be learned from that student's story?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

INVITING ALUMNI . . . EMPOWERED CURRENT STUDENTS AND IT GAVE ALUMNI A SENSE OF AGENCY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITIES

ral from other professional school counselors) to have implemented empowerment strategies in the urban school setting. He gathered a total of 15 interviews. Participants were initially drawn from the first author's informal networks of school counselors who shared an interest in empowerment strategies and identified themselves as Chicana/o, Latina/o, and/or Mexican American. The researcher did not seek to exclude non-Chicana/o or Latina/o school counselors from the study; it happened to be that those in the researcher's professional network who engaged in empowerment strategies were all of Chicana/o or Latina/o

background. The participants ranged from 23 to more than 51 years of age, and the years of experience as a school counselor ranged from 2 to more than 21 years. Table 1 outlines the participants' background information including their gender, age, ethnicity, years of professional experience, and language(s) spoken.

Procedures
The researcher e-mailed eight school counselors whom he knew through professional networks. All met the above criteria and were able to provide rich description. All potential participants received an invitation e-mail from the researcher that informed

them about the purpose of the study and provided information on how to contact the researcher to schedule an interview. All eight school counselors agreed to participate and signed informed consent statements prior to being interviewed. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participant to forward the researcher's contact information to other potential participants who met the participation criteria. Four of the eight original interviewees recommended other potential participants. Ten additional participants contacted the researcher and he interviewed seven of these 10. Data collection stopped at the end of the 15th interview due to achieving saturation; according to Patton (2002), saturation is reached when no new data result from additional interviews.

All interviews were audio recorded and the researcher used pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. After each interview, the researcher took reflective notes, wrote memos, and listened to each audio recording in order to ensure that he accurately documented what he observed and heard during the interview. Reflecting on one's data immediately following interviews is crucial for ensuring the rigor and validity of one's data (Patton, 2002).

The researcher conducted data analysis on the first eight participants and simultaneously interviewed the next seven participants, as is consistent with a constant comparative method of data analysis (Creswell, 2013). He sent audio recordings to a transcription service immediately after each interview. He then sent interview transcripts to participants so they could check for accuracy and expand on any of their previous responses; this also served as an initial member check, which is an integral process for achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research (Demarrais, 2004; Patton, 2002). Only one participant asked to have an answer modified. The research procedures associated with this study complied with the standards of the Human Subjects Board.

Data

Interviews. Individual interviews were the primary data source for this study. The researcher asked participants how they promote the personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. A sample question was, "What strategies do you use to engage Chicana/o and Latina/o students in activities or discussions aimed at fostering positive ethnic identity?" Table 2 outlines the interview protocol used to gather data from the participants. Interviews ranged in length from 40 to 70 minutes and occurred at a mutually agreed-upon location. Participants were asked all interview questions listed in Table 2; follow-up questions were used to acquire sufficient detail or to highlight practices implemented by the participant.

Documents. The researcher supplemented the in-depth interviews by collecting and reviewing documents. Marshall and Rossman (1999) stressed that the review of documents strengthens and adds overall richness to interview data. The researcher was able to collect documents from eight of the 15 participants. The documents collected included pictures of the participants' offices, culturally relevant books students were reading in class, flyers for youth leadership conferences and school clubs, portraits of parent meetings, and pictures of students engaging in activism. The collection of these documents assisted the researcher in understanding how these school counselors promoted the personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. These documents also aided in the triangulation of data collected from the participants, enhancing the rigor of this study.

Data Analysis

Utilizing the qualitative analysis software NVivo10 for data management, the researcher implemented the constant comparative method of data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2005). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the constant comparative method involves three levels of analyses: (a) open coding, (b) axial

coding, and (c) selective coding. During open coding, the researcher conducted a systematic read of every interview and document provided by each participant. This led to the identification of 123 codes across the eight initial interviews. Coded segments of data ranged in length from one sentence to a long paragraph. Some examples of open codes were "sharing personal story" and "building relationships." Through this process, the researcher also reflected on the emergent categories and created reflective notes and memos.

During axial coding, the researcher began by comparing the categories developed within each individual interview, then compared categories between the interviews. This process led to the consolidation of similar codes, the elimination of codes that were considered unrelated to the phenomenon under investigation, and the creation of new codes. At the conclusion of this process, 29 codes remained. For instance, the open codes of "sharing personal story" and "building relationships" were combined to create the axial code of "rapport and personal relationships." Open codes such as "gender roles" and "leadership positions" were deemed unrelated and were deleted.

During selective coding, the researcher identified the core criteria consisting of four subthemes (rapport and personal relationships, involving alumni, building sociocultural awareness, and social action) that captured how school counselors facilitated the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The researcher was aware of the subjectivity that is involved in qualitative research and the bias that he brought to this research process. He describes his positionality here in order to bracket his bias and increase the trustworthiness and credibility in this study. The researcher is a critically conscious Chicano/Latino school counselor in the Santa Ana Unified School District and is committed to the empowerment of the Chicana/o and Latina/o student population he serves. The first author's personal commitment to and belief in the need for the empowerment of Chicana/o

> ## FIELD TRIPS PROVIDED STUDENTS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE CHICANA/O AND LATINA/O COLLEGE STUDENTS, EMPOWERING THEM ON A PERSONAL LEVEL AND INSPIRING THEM TO ATTEND COLLEGE.

and Latina/o students led him to conduct the current study. Furthermore, the first author recognizes that his personal opinion on how empowerment should be undertaken and his personal experience in engaging in an empowerment model of school counseling serve as a potential limitation. The first author believes that school counselors must make a purposeful effort to examine inequalities in student data (e.g., discipline, college readiness, academic tracking), meet with school leaders to find solutions to address unequal disparities, and actively work with students to facilitate critical consciousness, promote identity development, and encourage social action. The second author is a Chicano counselor educator who served as a mentor to the researcher during this study—specifically, helping the researcher craft the research design and execute the data analysis—and assisted in writing all sections of this article.

The researcher made every attempt to control the influence of bias in this study, but no qualitative research study is entirely free of bias (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation of data, peer debriefs, and member checks from participants were conducted to

ensure trustworthiness and credibility (Demarrais, 2004; Patton, 2002). Triangulation involves a process of corroborating the evidence about a claim using multiple elements of data (Creswell, 2013). For example, the researcher collected documents from participants to corroborate their statements. Peer debriefs are a process whereby a researcher asks a colleague to examine his or her work as means of identifying bias (Patton, 2002). Two doctoral students who had expertise in qualitative methods examined the data and conclusions related to the present study. Although the doctoral students provided alternative understandings for several codes, they supported the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Last, member checking is a process in which the researcher asks participants to check the accuracy of his or her findings (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher e-mailed participants in the present study so that they might review the emerging themes derived from this study. Three participants responded to the researcher's e-mail and agreed with the conclusions of this study.

RESULTS

This section presents the strategies that the participants in this study reported using in facilitating the personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students. These findings are organized into the following four themes: rapport and personal relationships, involving alumni, building sociocultural awareness, and social action.

Rapport and Personal Relationships
Building rapport and personal relationships as a strategy to personal empowerment emerged from 13

participants. The school counselors in this study spoke about the need for Chicana/o and Latina/o students to connect with someone who understood their language and cultural background. These connections were often with the school counselors themselves. For example, Milagros commented on the significance of building relationships with Chicana/o and Latina/o students:

> I think everybody needs to be making sure that their relationship is the biggest thing with [Chicana/o and Latina/o] students, because sometimes you're the only connection they have with this type of world where there are educational opportunities available, there is an opportunity to change your life. But if it's all, "Okay, these are your requirements; this is what you need to do—check, check, check. Okay, we took care of—" That's not going to work with our kids. And if you want to empower them and you want them to have more opportunities, more options, more choices, then you need to step up your game, and by that I mean being connected to them in any way that they need.

As articulated by Milagros, the study participants stated that being a school counselor is more than just providing students with information, but rather making the students feel like they have a home inside the school building; this is the foundation for facilitating personal empowerment.

Noelia explained how she built relationships with her students by sharing her own personal story.

> I share a similar story with them. I am an immigrant in this country. My parents migrated here. I struggled financially; my family

struggled financially. I was the first in the family to graduate from high school, go off to college, navigate that system. I know how they're feeling. When they ask me I can tell them exactly that, like, "I know, you're scared, I was feeling that, too." Again, when they see me, they see a familiar face. They see a brown face. I think that alone just brings down the walls. They trust me and then, when I start talking to them, then they see, oh, this person really cares.

The participants expressed how building rapport and personal relationships facilitated personal empowerment for Chicana/o and Latina/o youth. They maintained that these interactions helped students build a cultural connection with them, building the student's self-confidence leading to their empowerment.

Involving Alumni
Another key subtheme that was discussed by nine of the participants in this study was the importance of active participation of alumni to promote personal empowerment. Participants voiced that they invited alumni who they felt were empowered to share their personal stories of how they were successful in graduating from high school and pursuing their aspirations. The participants commented that the purpose of inviting alumni was two-fold: It empowered current students and it gave alumni a sense of agency to contribute to their respective communities. Lucha expressed, "Alumni contribute to the work that we do, so when students see that folks that graduated before them become successful—students feel empowered to see that. It helps them feel motivated that they can do it as well." Lucha shared images of her office with pictures of alumni in graduation regalia as a technique to motivate her students.

Similarly, Pancho recalled how he invited an alumnus to give a presentation to his students:

"THE FACT THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING . . . MAKE CHANGE ON CAMPUS, IS SOMETHING WE'RE ALL PROUD OF."

We invited a previous graduate of [Union] high school and he just graduated from [the university] last year. He is a young guy...He came, and he was talking about the obstacles that he faced as a middle school student, as a high school student, and how he was able to turn around...I just can't tell you...I had a long line of students...all of them wanting his e-mail address because they wanted to be able to talk to him, they wanted to be engaged with him.

The data that emerged from participants revealed that involving alumni was another way to encourage personal empowerment. This involvement not only empowered Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students but also the alumni because it allowed them to have an influence in their communities and contribute to social change.

Building Sociocultural Awareness

The subtheme of building sociocultural awareness refers to the strategies used by school counselors to provide Chicana/o and Latina/o students with awareness of social inequities, their academic potential, and their cultural heritage. Ten of the 15 school counselors in this study expressed that building students' sociocultural awareness was a strategy for promoting personal empowerment. Eight of the participants felt it was imperative that they assist students to think critically about their world and how they can improve their living situations. Participants used two different methods to build students' sociocultural awareness: college field trips and individual discussions.

Lucha encouraged students to participate in college workshops and field trips to build awareness of students' academic potential:

I do different activities whether it's college workshops, college field trips, and sharing the reality with them of what the numbers look like for Latinos going on to higher education. They need to know that,

so that way when they go there, it's not a shock to them.

In considering how encouraging Chicana/o and Latina/o students to attend field trips built sociocultural awareness, four of the school counselors in this study commented that field trips provided students with the opportunity to see Chicana/o and Latina/o college students, empowering them on a personal level and inspiring them to attend college. In addition to encouraging students to attend college field trips, over half of the participants engaged students in individual discussions to build sociocultural awareness. To build sociocultural awareness Diego decorated his office with various cultural artifacts. He described his reason for doing this:

SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN INCORPORATE CHICANA/O AND LATINA/O ARTIFACTS IN THEIR OFFICES AND USE THESE . . . TO CONNECT WITH STUDENTS AND ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

I have it up, you know, just to make them aware and if they want to do some follow-up and some deeper investigation on it...it's important to know about the history and political figures and important events that aren't really taught in traditional classrooms.

Like Diego, Noelia had Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural posters on her office walls to promote cultural awareness in her students. She commented, "I actually do it purposefully to make them aware of important Latino figures...I've seen that the students have really internalized a lot of racism. I'm hoping that this will allow them to see Latinos in a positive light." An example of a poster on her wall was a Latina wearing graduation regalia with the word "Dream" written on top. By presenting students with positive images of Chicana/o and Latina/o culture, these school counselors hoped to engage students in conversations that might lead to challenging nega-

tive stereotypes and inspire students to build their sociocultural awareness.

Social Action

The final theme, social action, emerged from 10 of the participants and described school counselors connecting students with social advocacy groups in the community and school clubs on campus. Using the data in this subtheme, the authors argued that through their professional roles, school counselors have the power to facilitate the involvement of Chicana/o and Latina/o students in their schools and the larger community—which was vital to students' personal empowerment (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). For example, Selena shared how she encouraged students to make changes to policies in their school:

I would just promote certain events or certain programs...You know at [Esco High School] we had the program [Fuerza Latina]. The [Fuerza Latina] empower the students at the high schools to make changes in school, whatever it is that they feel that is not being fair to them as students or anything that they feel like the school needs to change. They kind of empower the students to learn the rules of the school and to make a change for not just certain particular students, but for the whole school overall. So I know one of the things the students did was to change the discipline of the school, what they call restorative justice.

After the involvement of her students in Fuerza Latina, a major shift occurred in ideology on suspending and disciplining students. Students gained a voice in the discipline policies in the school, empowering them to continue altering rules and practices.

Similarly, Diego shared how he connected students with a community-based organization called Change, Inc.:

> They're learning about social change, social justice, learning about different cultures, diversity struggles in the past...[Change, Inc.] takes them out to community events and teaches them how to advocate for themselves. So [they] really advocate for them and get them...out of their comfort zone.

TO PROMOTE SOCIAL ACTION ON THE PART OF CHICANA/O AND LATINA/O STUDENTS, PARTICIPANTS ENCOURAGED THEM TO TAKE ON ISSUES OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE WITHIN THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES.

Diego provided an image of the mural that his students helped create. The mural illustrated powerful messages such as a school bus with "books" painted on it, a phrase that read "more schools, less prisons" and the word "oppression" written in bold letters. Diego went on to add how he personally witnessed dramatic changes in his students:

> The fact that they were able to accomplish something...make change on campus, is something we're all proud of. All these students who probably would never speak up. I see a lot of empowerment in those students who I saw were shy or would never have thought they would be in these type of groups... now they're doing these things like building a mural.

These findings are evidence of how school counselors encouraging community engagement facilitated the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how school counselors facilitated the personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students. Fifteen participants shared their experiences and reflected on the use of rapport and personal relationships, involving alumni, building sociocultural awareness, and encouraging social action to facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. These strategies map directly onto the empowerment model of critical consciousness, positive identity, and social action described earlier in this paper. Furthermore, the findings of this study provide school counselors with a likely process for facilitating the development of personal empowerment for Chicana/o and Latina/o students.

Positive identity is described as an important component in the development of personal empowerment (Carr, 2003). In this study, participants promoted positive identity by incorporating cultural artifacts and affirming cultural messages in their offices. These artifacts typically inspired Chicana/o and Latina/o students to ask questions and led participants in this study to engage in discussions about culture and history. These findings also support the need for culturally relevant curriculum. Chun and Dickson (2011) contended that culturally relevant pedagogy instilled cultural pride, improved academic engagement, and fostered personal empowerment in Chicana/o and Latina/o youth. The present study suggests that school counselors can incorporate Chicana/o and Latina/o artifacts in their offices and use these artifacts as a means to connect with students and engage in dialogue with students to promote positive identity.

Arguably, the more important component for facilitating personal empowerment is the need for social action (Carr, 2003; Gutierrez, 1995). To promote social action on the part of Chicana/o and Latina/o students, participants encouraged them to take on issues of social injustice within their schools and communities. Some study participants specifically pushed students to join clubs on their school campus and others connected students to community-based organizations. To encourage social action, the authors call on school counselors to be proactive in building partnerships with community-based organizations. School counselors are encouraged to begin with those organizations in their surrounding communities and those that actively engage youth. These opportunities can enrich and impact the personal/social, academic, and career aspects of Chicana/o and Latina/o students' lives.

Tamanas (2010) described critical consciousness as a likely first step towards personal empowerment. The authors expected that participants in this study would have implemented critical conversations as a strategy for promoting critical consciousness; this was not the case. Rather, participants in this study raised consciousness of social inequities by fostering sociocultural awareness in their students. Specifically, participants in this study built sociocultural awareness by taking Chicana/o and Latina/o students on field trips and by engaging in individual conversations. During these field trips and individual conversations, the school counselors aided their students in realizing many of the systemic inequities faced by Chicana/o and Latina/o students.

Also deviating from theories on promoting personal empowerment, participants in this study used alumni

to foster positive identity. The literature on promoting personal empowerment largely focused on the use of culturally relevant pedagogy to promote positive identity. That being said, Laden (1999) and Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) found that cultural role models could enhance the aspirations of students while maintaining their cultural identities. Linking those findings to empowerment theory, involving alumni might promote personal empowerment through the promotion of positive identity development. Having Chicana/o and Latina/o alumni involved on their school campuses can allow high school students to interact with successful role models from their community—possibly promoting positive identity and, ultimately, personal empowerment. To facilitate this process, school counselors can create alumni databases and e-mail discussion lists, and stay connected with alumni through social media sites. School counselors can then call upon alumni to speak at career fairs and youth conferences. As such, school counselors can promote positive identity development and possibly personal empowerment.

A precondition to empowerment is likely for school counselors to develop supportive relationships with their Chicana/o and Latina/o students. To this end, the school counselors in this study described the need for strong rapport and personal relationship building with Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students. All the participants in this study were Chicana/o and Latina/o school counselors and often used their shared backgrounds and life experiences as a tool to bond with students. This finding is consistent with those of Tamanas (2010) and Ozer and Schotland (2011), who indicated that supportive adult relationships fostered personal empowerment in youth. Although Tamanas (2010) and Ozer and Schotland (2011) did not directly discuss rapport and personal relationship building, participants in the present study used the methods of establishing rapport and building personal relationships with students to develop and demonstrate their support

for students. Study participants expressed that connecting with students did not have to be a daunting task; rather, it took small gestures, such as greeting the student in the morning or complimenting students. As such, the authors call for school counselors who seek to facilitate the personal empowerment of their Chicana/o and Latina/o students to begin by developing supportive relationships with those students by fostering rapport and nurturing personal relationships.

> ## HAVING CHICANA/O AND LATINA/O ALUMNI INVOLVED ON THEIR SCHOOL CAMPUSES CAN ALLOW STUDENTS TO INTERACT WITH SUCCESSFUL ROLE MODELS FROM THEIR COMMUNITY.

To facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students, participants in this study fostered critical consciousness by raising the sociohistorical awareness of students through college field trips. The school counselors used these field trips as an opportunity to discuss social inequities that are related to educational attainment and college going. Further, to promote positive identity, the study participants used cultural artifacts and involved alumni in their campus programing. The goal of both of these interventions was to challenge stereotypes of Chicana/o and Latina/o culture and to present positive and affirming cultural representations. Last, school counselors seeking to facilitate personal empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students encouraged participation in social action. This was done through school and local organizations that sought to challenge unjust policies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is based on the researcher's experience as a socially conscious

school counselor who approaches school counseling using empowerment theory. This may be a limiting factor because the researcher's bias might have influenced the findings of this study. Another possible limitation is that the researcher selected study participants based on their experiences in engaging in an empowerment approach to school counseling and the desire to document what an empowerment approach to school counseling looks like in practice; as such, he did not collect data on the outcomes of these counseling strategies. All participants in this study identified as Chicana/o or Latina/o, and this could be interpreted to indicate that Chicana/o and Latina/o counselors are more likely to engage in empowerment of Chicana/o or Latina/o youth, or that Chicana/o and Latina/o counselors engage youth in empowerment as a way to give back to the community. However, the findings of this study might not reflect how non-Chicana/o or Latina/o counselors engage in empowerment strategies. Due to the limited number of school counselors interviewed, this study cannot be regarded as representative of the experiences of all school counselors working with Chicana/o and Latina/o students from an empowerment perspective.

This study has attempted to operationalize strategies that school counselors used to facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. Additional research could determine how and why school counselors adopt an empowerment approach to working with Chicana/o and Latina/o students. Such research could further assist counselor education programs in preparing empowerment-oriented

school counselors. Such research also could assist school districts with large Chicana/o and Latina/o student populations in providing practicing school counselors with professional development on implementing empowerment-based interventions. Further research is needed to examine whether an empowerment approach to school counseling has an impact on Chicana/o and Latina/o students' academic achievement, career development, and personal/social development. Last, research is needed to investigate how non-Chicana/o/Latina/o participants implement an empowerment approach when serving Chicana/o and Latina/o students.

CONCLUSION

Numerous scholars have called for the empowerment of marginalized communities, including Chicana/o and Latina/o youth (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015). Despite this call, the literature has a gap regarding how to promote empowerment. Based on the findings of this study, some school counselors are fostering the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students in a manner consistent with empowerment theory. Using the work of these counselors as a blueprint, the authors call on school counselors to facilitate the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students by building rapport with students, promoting sociocultural awareness, fostering positive identity, and encouraging social action. Although additional research is necessary to document if empowerment leads to improved academic outcomes for Chicana/o and Latina/o youth, this article provides an important first step, giving school counselors specific approaches to promote the empowerment of Chicana/o and Latina/o youth. ■

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