

Subverting Dominant Notions of Role Modelling: Deconstructing the Performance of “Positive” Latino Manhood in Schools

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Outline of presentation

- Entry into this research
- The problem
 - Racism affecting boys and communities of color
 - The continuity of race and racism despite efforts of intervention
- Overview research on boys and men of color
- Conceptual framework
- Introduce my research project
- Select findings
- Implications: Seven justice-oriented principles
- Q&A

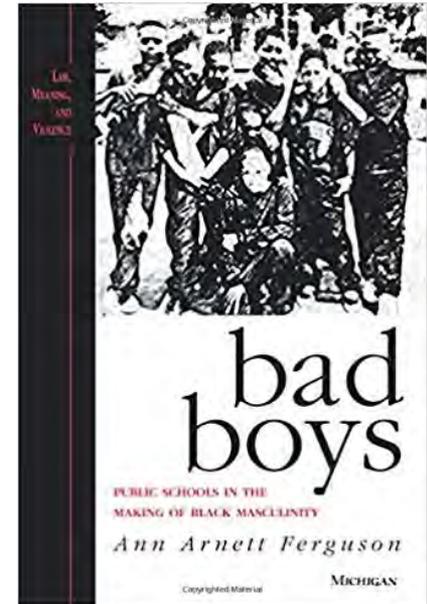
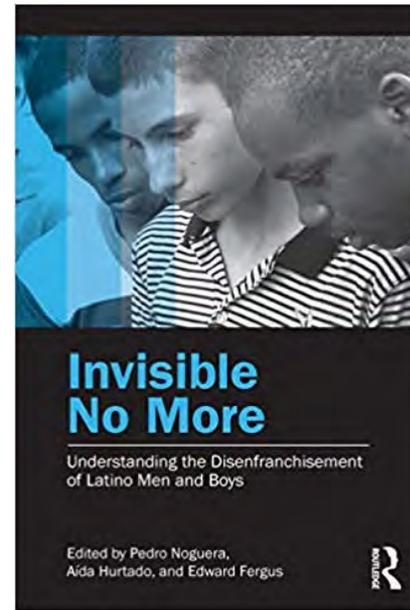
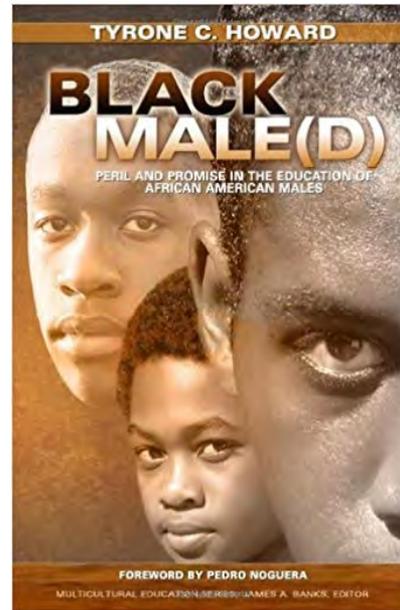
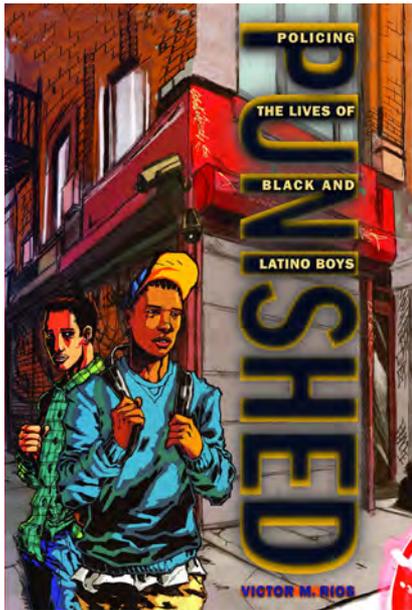
My entry into this work



Given the surveillance and punishment of Latino male bodies in U.S. schools, why is the Latino male educator triumphed by such a diverse array of stakeholders as a legitimate agent of patriarchal power?

What are the ideological implications in framing “successful” men of color as the educational saviors of boys of color, and what does this have to do with the (re)construction of race/gender/sexuality in schools?

Boys of color: Identities defined by punishment



Shifting the narrative through successful role models

- Massive recruitment and retention campaigns aimed at keeping men of color in the field of education (Bristol, 2018; Vision, 2015)
- Men of color educators draw on their own insiders' knowledge to provide culturally relevant teaching, mentorship, and guidance for struggling boys of color (Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006).
 - Disrupt the school-to-prison-pipeline
- A culture of success can re-signify the image of boys of color (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Harper, 2015)



My BROTHER'S KEEPER

Concerns about the turn towards men of color educators

- **Gender Injustice**

- Confining notions of masculinity (Brockenbrough, 2015; Martino, 2015; Lara and Fránquiz, 2015; Singh, 2019)
- “Intersectional failure” (Crenshaw, 2014)
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DW4HLgYPIA&t=1157s&ab_channel=SouthbankCentre

- **Critiques of Racial Deficit Rationale:**

- Challenges to the framing of male of color educators as “saviors” and “fixer” of problematic/bad boys (Baldrige, 2017; Brown, 2012; Pabon, 2016)
- My Brother’s Keeper functions as a form of **neoliberal governmentality** (Dumas, 2016)

Neoliberalism and education

- Neoliberalism: An economic theory and social discourse promoting the notion that economies and human beings function most efficiently when subject to an unregulated, free-market capitalism (Friedman, 2002).
- Promotes the privatization of public schooling (Lipman, 2011).
 - Charter schools, voucher programs, public-private partnerships, venture philanthropy
 - Neoliberal logics in education: Choice, consumer freedom, individualism, entrepreneurial spirit (Apple, 2006, Spence, 2015).
- **Neoliberal multiculturalism** is a racial discourse that offers a market lexicon to understand the problems and solutions of race (Melamed, 2011)
 - Language of diversity and opportunity
 - The problem of race is technical and actionable (as opposed to political)

The problem with neoliberal inclusion

- Neoliberalism individualized racial inequality
 - Students of color become self-entrepreneurs (Baldrige, 2014; Pedroni & Apple, 2005)
 - Creates binary between “good” multicultural subjects and racial others (Melamed, 2011)
- Neoliberal respectability politics intersect with gender and sexuality (Hong 2015).
 - Communities of color are seen as lacking traditional familial arrangements (heteropatriarchal, monogamous couplehood)
 - Men are not socialized to be responsible patriarchs
- Invitation to proper multicultural subjectivities



Top 10 HBCUs that Produce Black Male Teachers

TEXAS EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
for MALE STUDENTS *of* COLOR



All Male Summer Academy
Program Launch



Project MALES

Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success



COALITION OF SCHOOLS EDUCATING BOYS OF COLOR



Research questions

- How are the educational struggles of Latino boys framed/constructed in schools?
- What is the imagined role of Latino men in the struggle to support Latino boys?
- How do Latino men and boys articulate educational justice with one another?

Ethnographic study: Latino Male Success (LMS)

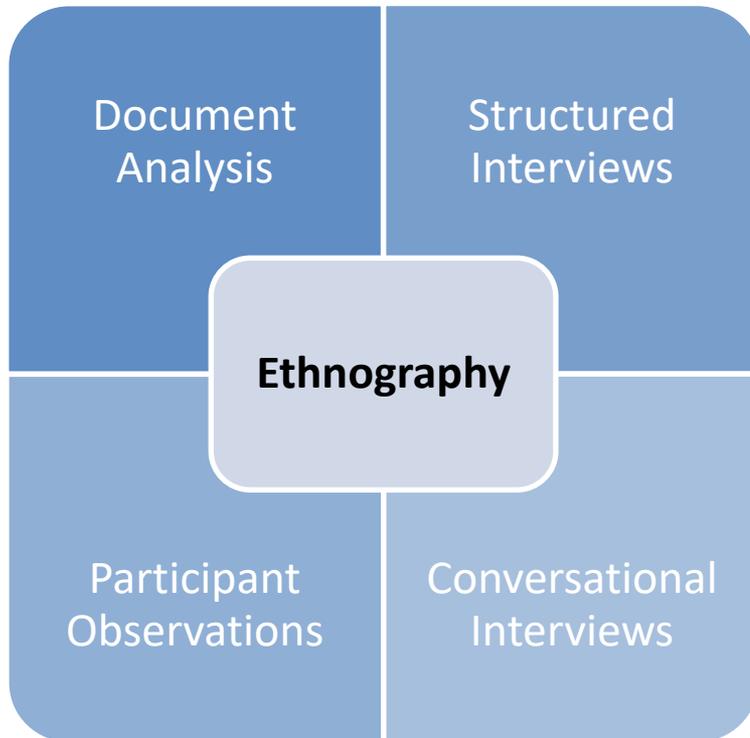
LMS Mentorship Program

- Located in Arroyo Seco, a mid or large sized city in California
- Established in 2010
- Run by Pueblo Unido: Latinx non-profit
- Functions in 10 Arroyo Seco Unified School District (ASUSD) middle and high schools
- In most cases LMS functioned as a daily advisory course or Chicano Studies class

The Mentors

- 10 mentors, each at an individual school
- Ages 23–31; all but one holding bachelor's degree
- Majority of mentors of Mexican descent
- Responsible for 15–25 students, ages 12–19, predominantly of Mexican and Central American descent.
- 6 percent of Latino boys in district

Data collection



- Document analysis
 - Program literature, curriculum, media clips, newspapers
- Formal Interviews
 - 13 mentors; 20 students
 - ASUSD and LMS administrators
- Participant observation (August 2017– May 2019)
 - Two middle school classrooms
 - One high school classroom
 - Events and fundraisers
- Conversational interviews
 - School site staff, teachers, parents

Findings overview

- **Finding 1:** A damage and deficit discourse dominated the ways in which the program was framed
 - Latino boys are broken/problematic and the district must address this problem
- **Finding 2:** Curriculum and everyday practices reinforced the notion that the role of the Latino male mentor was to fix the student, in part, by instilling neoliberal values through character development
 - Reenforcing meritocratic individualism
 - Propagating consumerist approaches to public education
 - Modelling a traditional, heteropatriarchal manhood for students
- **Finding 3:** Students both adopted and resisted these perspectives
- **Finding 4:** Some mentors subverted their positioning as positive Latino male role models and described different visions of justice
 - Queer disruptions
 - Critical mentoring

LMS mentoring promoted meritocratic individualism

Findings

- LMS classrooms cultivated identities defined by individual accountability, meritocracy.
- Students adopted the belief that success and failure were individual choices
- Self-discipline and “taking responsibility for your actions” were defining values of LMS classrooms

LMS Practices

- Tough-love type disciplinary practices
- Monetary grade competitions
- Public grade check-in and rankings
- Exclusion from activities when GPA dropped below 2.5



Meritocratic individualism: Student voices

- “It’s just laziness.”
- “Some of them just want to be funny.”
- “They don’t take responsibility for their actions...not like a real man.”

“For example, there’s Bryan, and it’s like bruh why do you come if you’re just going to mess around all the time? It’s so annoying. Like, he just wants to wear his headphones and is not interested in doing better. And if you don’t want to be here cool, but just go, so someone else can be here who wants to be here. That’s not fair for someone who might be able to benefit from these resources, you know?” – **Ignacio, 11th grader**

Meritocratic individualism: Student voices

“It’s because they don’t do the work. Simple as that. That’s why I’m failing. I was just being lazy, you know, slacking off, but I’m changing that.” –**Eric, 9th grader**

Meritocratic individualism: Monetary competitions and rewards

- Grade competitions for cash rewards reinforced competition
 - Naturalized a perceived merit-based inequality among the boys
- Most vulnerable students rarely “earned” money or fieldtrips





Manhood training as benevolent hetero-patriarchy

- **Manhood training from a deficit perspective:** Latino boys have missing or incorrect understandings of how to be good men. LMS must fill this deficit with proper (heteropatriarchal) manhood.
 - Addressing sexism through the failure of the machista
- Hyper focus on the traditional, nuclear family
 - Abusive fathers, uncles, domestic violence, alcoholism, absences
- Little awareness of critical perspectives in gender and sexuality
 - Mentors reported feeling undertrained to discuss gender identities and sexuality
- Continued use of misogynistic and homophobic language by both students and mentors

Living out benevolent hetero-patriarchy

“Sexism is a problem...a big problem that men need to address.... A good man, for me, is humble, responsible, and honorable...not a mujeriego [womanizer], you know? Be faithful to your wife...never hit her...a real man doesn't hit women” –
High School mentor

“...yeah yeah, that's true but... well like I wouldn't be saying that stuff when I'm like a dad, and like have a family and stuff...married.”
–**8th grade student**

Resisting dominant notions of role modelling



Subversive role models

- Criticisms of LMS and Pueblo Unido
 - “Conservative” goals, “bootstrap” ideology and “savior complex”
 - Normalization of cis and heterosexual culture
- Rejection of neoliberal superhero-mentor archetype (see Baldrige, 2017)
 - Intentional refusal of being a “good example”
 - More fluid and justice-centered approach to role modelling
 - Focus on critical mentoring and racial-justice pedagogy
 - Queering the figure of the positive Latino male role model
 - A prioritization on joy and fun, instead of discipline and management

The limits and contradictions of role modelling as racial justice

“It almost feels like deception. It feels like by being this “good role model” [uses air quotes], we are telling them that if you work really hard, if you just focus, if you don’t talk during class, you will succeed. It ignores, but also hides, a lot of those barriers that they face, or that their whole community faces.”

–Mr. Agustín

On neoliberal educational context

“We are put in a position to get kids to act a certain way . . . to change them. They [Pueblo Unido] don’t want little free thinking revolutionaries running around They want a real corporate-looking business kids [pretends to tighten a necktie and scrunches up his face in an exaggerated manner]. That’s why they want to take kids to Morgan Stanley, so they can learn how to be a part of this system. And so that corporation can give to Pueblo Unido.”

–Mr. Javier

Disrupting the “straight Latino male narrative”

“I feel there's A LOT of room for improvement in this area because if we operate from a belief that it's important for these Latino students to have Latino male role models that they look up to, you can't ignore that well, unless I have this wrong... I am the only gay one here. Aside from providing Latino male mentors, it seems infused in that we are also providing a straight cis-gender male mentor. So even though it may not be our intention to reproduce those power structures of male domination, of straight domination, it feels like it happens unintentionally. It feels like those are also being reproduced....and me just being here, and bringing this up, disrupts the whole straight Latino male narrative.”

–Mr. Agustín

Queering the positive Latino male role model

“I always get asked by my students if I want to get married or have children. I am like, “Not really to the marriage. Maybe to the kids.” Because a lot of the curriculum is like, we’re trying to picture this path where you can be that responsible father and husband. And because I have never seen myself in a husband role in the future, it was hard for me to be like, “Yes, this is what you would do to do that in the future.” Because that’s not what I’m doing.”

“My online bio will never say, ‘Mr. Agustín is a devoted husband and father of two kids’ . . . the whole white picket fence thing. And I think there’s value in that.”

Conclusion

- Despite the widespread popularity of mentorship programs, these programs are not ideologically neutral
 - Latino male mentorship, like any educational project, is ALWAYS political
- LMS was a space of contradictions and ideological battles as different visions of Latino male empowerment sought to be recognized.
- A deficit–orientation framed Latino boys and broken and in need of repair by “successful” Latino male role models
- Students and mentors adopted the values of LMS
- Students and mentors questioned the goals of LMS and sought to articulate alternative visions of educational justice

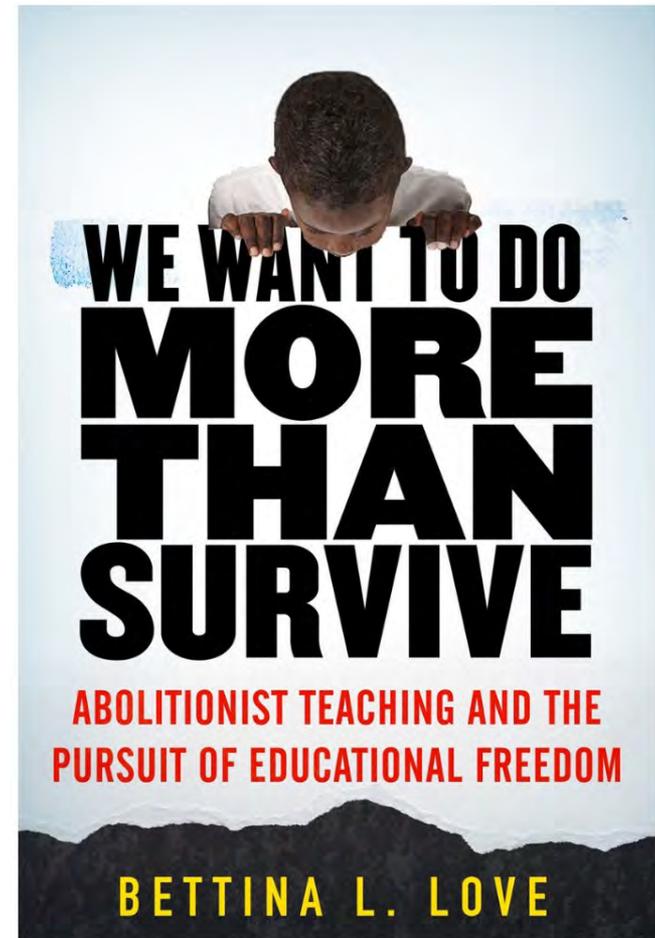
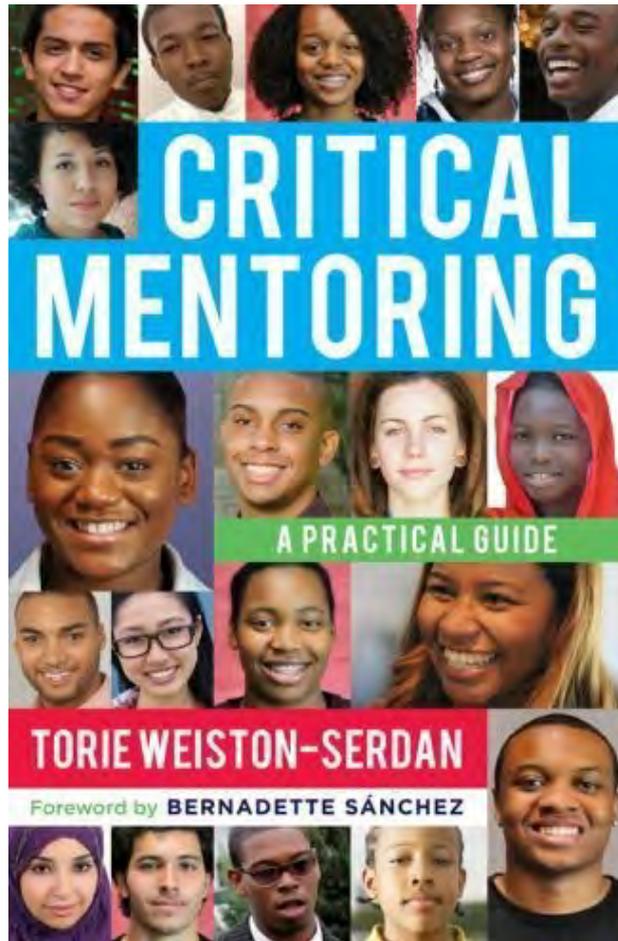
Implications for policy makers

- Reevaluation of the boy of color conversation with a critical analysis of the racial politics of neoliberalism
 - Seemingly well-intentioned programs may still perpetuate racial scripts assigned to boys of color
- Address heteropatriarchal logics undergirding boy of color programming (Crenshaw, 2015)
- Curriculum must look beyond individual character and focus on structures and social context
- Move from “crisis response” to justice (Love, 2019)

Implication for practitioners: 7 justice-oriented principles

1. Challenge deficit perspectives
2. Refuse the role of hero and savior
3. Disrupt the (hetero)patriarchal imagination of male mentorship
4. Deconstruct (not reconstruct) manhood
5. Critically analyze how cultural relevancy is valued
6. Challenge anti-Black framings of multiculturalism
7. Teach and dream towards educational justice

For practitioners: Further reading



Thank you

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Mr. Javier: Who defines a good role model?

“Two weeks ago, Nipsey Hussle got killed. And I think people right now are barely getting to see who Nipsey Hussle was as a human being. And what’s a trip though is because he was a rapper, because he was a crip [gang member], and because he was Black, there’s a lot of backlash because of the way people view those things. People are like, “Oh, how are you guys turning this gang member into a hero?” And for me, that was just a perfect example of what this country tries to do. For me, I don't see it that way... Nipsey Hussle, we have to talk about him with our students. He’s someone we should admire. But he doesn’t fit into how they say we should value someone.”

On neoliberal educational context

“I can’t speak for the founders of LMS, but honestly, just how we frame the work that we do makes us seem like a problem, like Latinos are the problem. So, that in its inception is going to only create things that create band-aid solutions, including this program. Right? So, yeah, we’re changing individual lives or whatever by giving them a mentor, but we’re not changing anything systemic that puts people in this position in the first place And as far as non-profits go, I think that’s their goal . . . non-profits were designed by the system itself to placate the movement, if you want it to be real, like people were ready to give their lives for a revolution and that’s something that is not even in the picture anymore because we have these non-profits.”

–Mr. Javier

The limits and contradictions of role modelling as racial justice

Unfortunately, I think there's a huge mismatch between what we want to do, versus what we're actually doing in LMS. . . . What we want to do is change the outcomes for Latino boys, have them succeed in high school, graduate, and go to college. But I see those issues, or those barriers, as not individually determined. It's not because they [Latino boys] are not working hard enough. The way I see it, it's a lot of outside structural barriers that are shaping their lives. It could be poverty, racism, or any of the other systems of oppression. So by giving them us [mentors/role models], I don't think we're really doing any kind of transformative work . . . Maybe some of our students will succeed, but not everyone.

The figure of the positive Latino male role model

The convergence of neoliberal discourses of race, gender, sexuality, as well as other social categories, to construct the epitome of Latino male respectability in the image of the positive Latino male role model. This representation of a respectable and heteropatriarchal Latino manhood is positioned in contrast to the deviant and problematic racialized characteristics associated with Latino men and boys. The figure of the role model serves as an invitation to Latino male respectability.