For Latina women, these assaults lead to different patterns of behavior. There will be those women who have a traditional stance and who make themselves subservient to the codes of others. Others may become marginal, find self-worth in the denial of their cultural heritage, and in turn feel guilt and experience self-hatred. Alternately, there are those women who develop a sense of pride in their cultural heritage or ethnic consciousness, are aware that racism, sexism and elitism are integral to the system, and somehow learn the prevailing norms that are different.

The question, then, is under what conditions do these assaults lead to a sense of giving up and under what conditions do they lead to constructive anger and engagement? For example, I have spoken to a number of Latina women who at some point became angry and said, “I’m going to show them that I can do it.” The anger enabled them to mobilize all their resources to succeed. What are the costs of using all this anger to succeed? Anger represents one way of coping with our status as a cultural, gender, and ethnic minority. Yet it is only one way of coping. We must also determine what other types of coping mechanisms are used by Latina women as they proceed toward their educational and career goals. Use of social support systems and role modeling constitute another coping mechanism. Role modeling also has a number of dimensions. It implies that the individual has an opportunity to observe and learn new roles that fit with expectations and aspirations, and it implies that the role model incorporates the concept of the individual and her ability to learn and that learning will be useful to her future.

Another case study illustrates the importance of social support and role modeling for young Latina women:

Maggie was a 25-year-old Puerto Rican woman. She had been in college for five years and had done very poorly. She was about to be expelled. She was living at home with her parents. The father worked in a handbag factory and the mother was a homemaker. Maggie was depressed and unable to move on her goals, which were to complete college and become a teacher. She had been working with Carole, a young, bright, progressive Anglo social worker. Carole asked me to talk with her advisee since she felt she had exhausted all her resources with her and was still unsuccessful. I asked Maggie to come see me. She missed many appointments, was late and quite reticent. We talked at first about her dreams and goals. After about three months, it became clear to me that Maggie was afraid to get good grades because she would become a professional and have to give up her family and community. She also felt stupid because she was shy and the instructor tended to ignore her. I helped Maggie to understand that she could use her education to help others in the community like her and that she had a quiet strength that was valuable. These two themes dominated the next two years. She repeated two college years and obtained all A’s and B’s. She graduated and two years later successfully completed her master’s degree and obtained a teaching position.  

In the last ten years I have worked with a number of Latina women who have experienced these fears or who have not achieved the balance of how to retain their own culture and participate in the structure. Social support and role models of successful Latinas have been critical, however, in enabling individuals to handle the situation better and overcome the barriers. Clearly, this positive response requires a fine balance between retaining or maximizing cultural stability and exploring ways of participating in the social structure. Most importantly, these ob-
servations and anecdotes suggest that Latina women must see and use social support and resources such as family and friends outside the educational institutions because these settings do not provide the necessary resources required for achievement.

The major question remains. How can Latina women make the transition into a world that is different from theirs? How do they reconcile or learn different values and norms without losing who they are? How do they overcome some of the cultural assaults from their peers, the schools, and the like? Some individuals have attempted to explain these transitions in terms of the concept of bicultural socialization.20 This approach integrates role modeling as a major determinant of socialization, as well as developing a solid identity in terms of race, gender, and class.

Bicultural socialization is the process by which individuals from an ethnic minority group are instructed in the values, perceptions, and normative behaviors of two cultural systems. There are at least six factors that influence the process.

1. The degree of overlap of commonality between the two cultures with regard to norms, values, beliefs, perceptions, and the like.
2. The availability of culture translators, mediators, and models.
3. The amount and type (positive or negative) of corrective feedback provided by each culture regarding attempts to produce normative behavior.
4. The conceptual style and problem-solving approach of minority individuals and their mesh with prevalent or valued styles of the majority culture.
5. The individual's degree of bilingualism.
6. The degree of dissimilarity in physical appearance from the majority culture, such as skin color and facial features.21

This model provides a conceptual framework, but it offers little specific information on the mechanism through which dual socialization occurs. Another related variable is ethnic consciousness, which can be loosely defined as that awareness in the individual, early or later on (is there a critical stage for its development?), that her options and choices are circumscribed by race, class, ethnicity, and gender. In this author's opinion, recognition of these barriers, which can be passed on by family members, role models, siblings, or self-observations, enable the individual to withstand some of the cultural assaults. There is an understanding that the assaults are external and not necessarily related to one's particular abilities, skills, or identity.

Thus the development of a model that attempts to understand the educational trajectory of Latina women must begin with a broad definition of socialization as a group of roles and skills acquired to negotiate the educational system within which they must participate and must also acknowledge that the institutional framework, as well as the social structure, works toward delimiting opportunities and choices. In effect, a reformulation of socialization and its relationship to identity development, and what psychological mechanisms are used to reconcile our own perceptions of ourselves with those of the dominant culture, is sorely lacking. Which coping mechanisms are most widely used by Latina women, and which are the most helpful in mediating their stressful environment? Concepts of ethnic consciousness and bicultural socialization serve as important mediating variables that
help the individual to function in two worlds without losing sight of one's status and/or identity in either.

Socialization is also directly influenced by social factors such as institutional settings. Schooling is a powerful determinant in the socialization experiences of Latina women. Two of the most critical elements in the schooling experience are tracking for ability and the types of courses that are available. Data on schools has consistently shown that minority low-income students are more likely to be placed in nonacademic tracks than others; that girls receive less attention and encouragement than boys; and that inner city schools, in particular, have few role models and/or counseling personnel who can encourage the educational aspirations of Latina women. A review of my preliminary data indicates that a substantial number of Latinas feel that their elementary and secondary school experiences failed to prepare them for higher education, and the majority of respondents felt no encouragement to pursue higher education. One respondent noted that her picture being put on a board with the caption beneath it, "A Common Girl,"

Thus, institutional factors must be examined as important contributors to the socialization of Latina women, with particular reference to the impediment to, or facilitation of, educational attainment. The focus of inquiry, however, must be on the interactive nature of institutional dimensions on the socialization experiences of Latina women and its influence on the educational aspirations and achievements of Latina women.

This model is, of course, a beginning attempt based on existing knowledge and observations to provide a framework for interpreting Latinas's success and lack of success in the educational system. A first step is to operationalize the variables and to test under what conditions they help to explain, under what conditions they fail to explain, and whether their variations are based on class, status, color, and availability of social support systems. Second, the relationship between institutional factors and educational attainment must be examined.

Clearly, we can no longer afford to use our intellectual energy to fight stereotypes and illogical conclusions. Battling these myths has bound racial/ethnic scholars in a research ghetto and has hampered theoretical growth. The double bind has resulted in the inability of scholars to examine the relationship between new research and theory and/or to use new research to modify existing theory or to generate it. In part this dilemma has been perpetuated by a lack of intellectual support by social scientists for new theoretical developments in the field as a whole.

Myths, of course, will continue to exist because of the general lack of knowledge about and interest in racial/ethnics. Our task, however, is to assure that our research is not circumscribed within the parameters set up by the myth. We must move forward in proactive rather than reactive ways to address the issues of concern to Latina women. In the process of creating new approaches to these concerns, we will also debunk the myths. The question, then, is how do we move forward?

First, it seems that there must be clear recognition that the historical conditions of Latina women continue to be different from those of dominant culture women. These material conditions have dictated roles for Latina women whereby they have interacted with social institutions from a different vantage point than White women. The perception of Latina women as deviant, or shy, passive, and unambitious because they are not following prescribed gender roles
is at best unfair and clearly ignores the reality of these women's experiences. Latina women actively participate in the outside world of work and community institutions. They observe the treatment of their families, spouses, and children. They are cognizant of the restrictions, limited options, and mythical characteristics ascribed to them and their cultural group. Consequently, they have a vision of life that is broader than dominant culture women. Based on their vision, there is also an impetus to develop and seek community and familial support structures to reinforce their identity.

Thus the analysis of Latina women needs to emerge from a description of their own experiences. Perhaps there will be many similarities with majority culture women based on gender alone. We must cease, however, making assumptions related to personal and institutional variables that have repeatedly been proven erroneous. We must move forward to find answers that reveal the reality that belies the myth.

Notes

I wish to acknowledge the theoretical contributions of Dr. Bonnie Dill and Dr. Elizabeth Higginbotham toward the formulation of many of the concepts in this paper. I worked with these colleagues on the Intersection of Race and Gender Project at the Center for Research on Women at Memphis State University. I also would like to acknowledge the support of the Ford Foundation and the UCLA Academic Senate Faculty Research Fund.


2. The terms "Latina" and "Hispanic Woman" will be used interchangeably. These two terms will primarily reflect research and observations of Mexican American and Puerto Rican women.


5. The term racial/ethnic is used to refer to historically subjugated, racially identifiable ethnic groups in the U.S. Those groups of interest are any collectivity whose membership is derived from a shared racial identity with high visibility in the society and who have a devalued social status, such as Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Blacks. See R. Staples and A. Miranda, "Racial and Cultural Variations Among American Families: A Decennial Review of the Literature on Minority Families," Journal of Marriage and The Family 42 (Nov. 1980): 887-903.


10. V. H. Silva-Palacios, “Immigration and Stress Among Mexican Adolescents” (Ph.D. diss., Wright Institute, Los Angeles, 1983).
18. Based on personal observations and experiences in academic institutions.
19. See note 18.
21. Ibid.
22. A cross-sectional survey conducted by UCLA asked two hundred women of Mexican origin about factors that contribute to the successful completion or noncompletion of higher education degrees. Results are available from the author, the researcher.
24. A nationwide study was conducted by the National Network of Hispanic Women. It is a survey of 304 women on the “Work and Family Life Experiences of Professional Hispanic Women.” The study was designed to provide (for the first time on a national level) a clear and comprehensive profile of patterns of organizational experiences of upwardly mobile professional Hispanic women; sources of stress and resources for coping with stress; health and mental health status of successful Hispanic women. The report is available from the NNHW in Los Angeles, California.