Haunted by the knowledge that one chooses to become a student. (Education is not an inevitable or natural step in growing up.) Here is a child who cannot forget that his academic success distances him from a life he loved, even from his own memory of himself. (Rodriguez, 1982, p. 48)

There is a long history of oppressed peoples all over the world seeking to find and be connected with “home.” In the southwest, Chican@s (Chicanos/as) coined Aztlan as the physical, psychological, spiritual, and cultural homeland. The Palestinians face current struggles associated with claiming their “home,” and graffiti artists and well-known hip hop artists have long sought to represent and link with their “home” (Carrillo, 2010). In fact, “the concept of homeland occupies a central position in the thought and development of most cultures” (Anaya & Lomeli, 1989, p. ii).

This qualitative study examines the ways in which Mexican-origin scholarship boys (Hoggart, 1957/2006; Rodriguez, 1982) use their conceptions and connections to their working-class “home” to achieve academic excellence all the while resisting hegemonic discourses in higher education. “Home” is framed as site of political memory, hope, agency, and struggle. Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the unhomely provides additional theoretical grounding for exploring the schooling trajectories of the scholarship boys. This research moves beyond clean victory narratives by unpacking various traumas associated with social class mobility, bounded assimilation, and the politics of whistream (Urrieta, 2009) knowledge and settings in higher education. The analysis of the students’ identities and coping strategies provides valuable contributions to the dearth of research on academically successful Latino males that come from low-income settings.

Keywords: Latino males, urban education, higher education, identity

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This article examines the role of “home” and how the barrio past of Mexican-origin “high achievers” informs their identities. I use the term “ghetto nerd” (partially informed by Diaz, 2007) interchangeably with “scholarship boy” (Hoggart, 1957; Rodriguez, 1982), as a way to capture intellectual identities informed by working-class and critical positionalities. Home is not only a physical space connected to the scholarship boys’ working-class roots, but also a psychic, emotional, spiritual, and cultural metaphor that serves as a life-orientation “compass.” To understand the role of “home” for Mexican-origin scholarship boys, I examine the life histories of two males who resist many of the racialized, gendered, and classed discourses of K-12 schools and higher education, all the while still achieving academic success. This conceptualization of “home” has significant consequences for the way schooling is approached and how strategies are formulated and enacted to achieve academic success and for the development of healing opportunities.

This is an important area of inquiry because Latino male students are “vanishing” from the higher education pipeline and there is a limited amount of work on Latino masculinities (Mirandé, 1997; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Latina women makeup sixty-one percent of Latin@ (Latino/a) students in higher education and Latino males earn only thirty nine percent of all bachelor’s degrees earned by Latin@s (Sáenz, Valdez, Rodríguez, Bukoski & Lu, 2011). Also, drawing from Lopez (2011), since not all masculinities receive the same access to networks nor receive the same validation within the larger society (including schools), it is important to document the specific ways in which working-class Latino masculinities produce culturally situated notions of academic/intellectual manhood.

**Theoretical Grounding**

**Mexican-Origin Scholarship Boys**

For Hoggart (1957), the scholarship boy is an “uprooted and anxious” working-class student that achieves academic success. There is a constant collision of two seemingly irreconcilable worlds, both cultural extremes (Hoggart, 1957; Rodriguez, 1982). There are also tensions associated with developing new tastes, consciousness, and the ambivalent nostalgia that goes with the occasional dislocations and wanting to go back “home.” Hoggart’s assessment, and later, Rodriguez’s (1982) application to his Mexican American experience, provide tools for complicating clean victory narratives often associated with low SES students that “make it.” Moreover, the scholarship boy concept reminds educators, future students who consider crossing social class boundaries, and other interested stakeholders, about the conflicts often inhering to “rising up.” Still, Rodriguez’s public-private binary and Hoggart’s portrayal are somewhat incomplete. Rodriguez believes that his “Americanization” was necessary and inevitable. Even if painful, the costs associated with assimilation are worth it, Rodriguez claims. While Hoggart does not take on an analysis of students of color, Rodriguez does not fully analyze the potential and merits of ongoing resistance to various assimilationist aspects of the schooling process. The present article takes these two issues into account.

Along with the scholarship boy lens, I will explore the “unhomely” (Bhabha, 1994) aspects of the schooling trajectories of Mexican-origin scholarship boys. For Bhabha, “the unhomely relates to the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history, to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (1994, p. 15). This work
seeks to examine the inherent gains and losses associated with academic success, but also attempt to provide nuance and complexity to the political project that is seeking academic success within dominant society. I examine how Mexican-origin scholarship boys use specific strategies connected to how they imagine their working-class “home” in coping and negotiating the discomforts associated with achieving academic excellence in urban, U.S. K-12 schools and whitestream (Urrieta, 2009) universities.

**Latino Males: Historical Context and Current Concerns**

Working-class Latino males face a plethora of systemic and historical conditions that affect their personal development and academic attainment. Below I provide an analysis of the literature by covering three relevant areas: (1) historical context, (2) college access literature, and (3) scholarship on Latino males and the limits of masculinities research.

**Historical context.** According to Gutierrez, “Anglos historically have learned how to dominate Mexicans without a large police force; psychological violence, fear, physical harm, and economic reprisals…” (1998, p. 23). Within this historical backdrop, Latin@s have long been concentrated in schools that are overcrowded, segregated, under-resourced, have high teacher turnover, deficit thinking, and subtractive schooling practices (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; Oakes, 2005; Valencia, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Additionally, as Valencia (2011) points out, there are deeply rooted conditions (school segregation, language suppression and cultural exclusion, school financing, teacher student interactions, teacher certification, curriculum differentiation, special education, gifted education, teaching force) that shape educational outcomes (low academic achievement, high rates of grade retention, poor school holding power, low matriculation rates to go to college, disparate impact of high stakes testing, school stress) for Chicano students. Latino males are also often situated within a “youth control complex, a system in which schools, police, probation officers, families, community centers, the media, businesses, and other institutions systematically treat young people’s everyday behaviors as criminal activity” (Rios, 2011, p. xiv). So it is not surprising to see how some schools become push-out factories and adversely affect the holistic growth of Latin@ students.

In this current century, Latin@s are embellished within a social context in which there are “massive reconfigurations in the structure of the economy, a devolution and disintegration of social programs, an expansive retreat from Civil Rights, new political realignments, and a dissolution of the meaning of cultural democracy” (Murillo, Jr., 2010, p. xvi). Additionally, Latin@s are now the largest ethnic/racial group in the United States, with 13% of the total U.S. population and only 11% (over the age of 25) hold a bachelor’s degree compared to 30% of Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004; Villalpando, 2010). Latino males have to interact with micro and macro forces that require unique and empowered identity improvisations in order to “survive” the hegemonic discourses and socio-cultural and political alignments that may diminish their opportunities to achieve academic success.

**College access literature.** College access literature usually focuses on three areas: academic preparation, cost and financial aid, and information constraints (Flores, 2010, p. 212). Latin@ students often experience dismal academic preparation in low
SES schools. In this context, they tend to attend schools that are under-resourced have high teacher turnover, punitive high stakes rote curriculum, and a revolving door of administrative leadership. Also, as Flores (2013) contends, “Latino students on average have lower incomes and educational attainment rates than majority students” (p. 213). This fact is important, considering that there have been increasing cuts in need based financial aid and a transition to merit based aid (Doyle, 2006).

Most Latin@ students who graduate from high school end up attending community college (Adelman, 2005). While a beneficial experience for some students, most Latin@ students attending community colleges do not earn a college degree (Leigh & Gill, 2003). All in all, Latin@ students experience a series of difficulties in accessing higher education and their bilingual-bicultural identities are often muted by schooling spaces that are not prepared to engage the social and cultural worlds that they embody.

Scholarship on Latino males and the limits of masculinities research. Mirandé (1997) contends that most past research on Latino men was conducted by White men who did not have the necessary background knowledge to accurately make sense of what they were observing. Currently, there is a growing group of Latin@ scholars focusing on the schooling experiences of Latin@ males (Garrett, Antrop-Gonzalez & Vélez, 2010; Noguera, Hurtado & Fergus, 2012; Ríos, 2011; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Among the most discussed issues is the gender gap in education. Sixty-one percent of Latin@ students in higher education are female (Sáenz et al., 2011). In 2000, less than 6 percent of all bachelor’s degrees awarded to men went to Latinos, versus 75 percent to White men (Villalpando, 2010). The root causes of these outcomes are varied and situated within economic, historical, political, and sociocultural dimensions. In terms of masculinities and the cultural production of manhood, scholars have explored issues such as the role of machismo, historical implications of colonialism, social class, patriarchy, connections between capitalism and counter-school attitudes, issues germane to cultural and social capital, and the importance of seeking “respect” among males (Anzaldúa, 1987; Baca Zinn, 1982; Foley, 1990; Mirandé, 1997; Ríos, 2011; Willis, 1977).

The role of men as cheap labor often becomes part of the core social imaginary and there remains a significant gap of nuanced scholarship that might provide alternate portrayals (Noguera, Hurtado & Fergus, 2012). Additionally, even with the emergence of young scholars, when one scours the research on men and masculinities, a striking gap exists in the research with specific links to school settings on Latino males (Torres, 2013). Important work on hegemonic and subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1995; Messerschmidt, 1993) and even readers on masculinities largely omit qualitative accounts of the identities of Latino male ghetto nerds. Illustratively, the flagship reader Men’s Lives (Kimmel & Messner, eds., 1992) had only one very old essay in this area; its most recent, 2012, edition has one chapter (out of fifty-three) focusing on Latino masculinities.

Clearly, current work on Latino males provides important avenues by which to understand the identities and struggles of this population. There are various cultural, structural, political, and historical dimensions to the issue. Much of the research has focused on the “problems” that Latino males face in schools. Surprisingly, few studies have explored the identities of academically successful, working-class Latino males. Moreover, class and race/ethnicity have usually been framed as dialectical tensions that produce rigid, counter-school attitudes. Willis explains:
In a strange unspecified way mental labour henceforth always carries with it the threat of the demand for obedience and conformism. Resistance to mental work becomes resistance to authority as learned in school. The specific conjunction in contemporary capitalism of class antagonism and the educational paradigm turns education into control, (social) class resistance into educational refusal and human difference into class division. (1977, p. 103)

In Willis’s exploration of the identities of the working-class lads, mental work becomes an effeminate and conformist act, which must be resisted. Foley (1990) also had a similar take on the “vatos” that upheld counter-school attitudes in south Texas. In the analysis of the scholarship boys that are part of this study, we see a more nuanced resistance, where insider-outsider tensions of class, race, ethnicity, and gender are negotiated in a much more elastic and hybrid manner all the while still achieving academic success.

**Methodology**

This research consisted of life history interviews conducted over one year. Utilizing a snowball sampling (R. Weiss, 1994) process, scholarship boys were identified via their reading of an essay that I published in a 2007 issue of *Journal of Latinos and Education*, “Lost in Degree: A Chicano PhD Student’s Search for Missing Clothes.” Upon reading this piece, many students contacted me to share their connection to the scholarship boy-type themes that were covered in the essay. Drawing from referrals from those that contacted me, I selected participants based on meeting the following criteria: born and raised in U.S. urban settings; working-class upbringing; attended low SES k-12 schools; earned at least a graduate degree; and of Mexican origin.

Triangulation consisted of life history interview data, a reflexive journal, and document analysis. There were four interviews conducted per subject, each lasting from one to one-and-one-half hours. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of each participant. All of the interviews were conducted and transcribed by the author. The analysis of the data consisted of (1) using my “cultural intuition” (Delgado-Bernal, 2001) as a Mexican-origin scholarship boy, (2) a two-phase coding process, open and closed (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Additionally, I drew on relevant work for guidance on research methods (Gándara, 1995; Urrieta, 2009).

**Portraits**

The following are brief portraits of the two scholarship boys.

**Mario.** Born and raised in a low SES urban area located in the southwestern U.S., Mario is the first person in his family to earn a college degree. He currently is working on a doctoral degree at the flagship university in his home state. His degree focus is in the area of Curriculum and Instruction. He is in his mid-thirties and has an insider-outsider relationship with his graduate program. He moved out of the city in which the university is located because he wanted to have more roots in his community of origin. He felt a certain anxiety and tension by living near the university and feels more at “home” in the neighborhoods where he grew up. Currently, he works as an administrator at a public middle school in his hometown and is involved in community organizing.
Carlos. Born and raised in a low SES community in a major urban center located in the southwestern U.S., Carlos is the first person in his family to earn a college degree. In fact, he states: “since 1968, we have three high school graduates out of about thirty familiares (relatives) who went to school here in the U.S.” He earned a doctorate from a top-tier university located in the southwest. He currently lives in his hometown and is an assistant professor of human development at a local university. Carlos is an extremely nuanced, critical, reflexive, and humane scholar. He connects the mind and heart in very inspirational ways.

Analysis

The Unhomely in the Scholarship Boy Borderlands

Homeless is a metaphor for knowing where you are from.—Mario

The trope of “home” and search for a psycho-spiritual homeland refer to a provocative space of inquiry for Mexican-origin high scholarship boys. In the dystopic imagination of home, we have the birth of a subject. The scholarship boy adds invention and revision to all relationships, metanarratives, and rituals. Home also is the informer of a consciousness that wrestles with past, present, future, and hybrid expectations of success in a brown body. The role of an imagined and tangible community informs everyday practices and decisions.

Home, according to Carlos, has specific functions.

I know vatos going on their 10th or 11th year (graduate school) that have yet to finish because of this loyalty to a certain kind of Chicano representational practice. I respect that homie, for reals. It’s hard to watch, you gotta respect the willingness not to fold in this world. Home makes you strong like that, distorts you in all kinds of ways, makes you ill-suited to the “surface” culture of the university.

The ambivalences that come from negotiating racial, ethnic, and classed spaces in academia result in standpoints that in some instances may appear to be counterproductive. The unhomely (Bhabha, 1994) nature of being an insider-outsider provides for a continuous sense of ambiguity and resistance. Mirandé (1997), on the other hand, contends that the “reasonable man” is not driven by emotion, but instead is very rational and focused on logic. Carlos believes that the surface culture of the university is very much expecting behaviors associated with a hegemonic notion of a reasonable man of letters. Carlos comes from an experience that has nurtured certain emotions and vulnerabilities. His positionality as a Latino ghetto nerd is not a cookie-cutter identity that reflects some sanitized notion of the educated person. Carlos reflects on his own past:

Home for me was violent, dysfunctional, and traumatic. It was also efficacious and fulfilling, but the majority of our family’s time in Pico east [pseudonym], of our extended family’s time in the United States has been on the underside of the American illusion that each generation does a little better...

Home is an entangled domain of positive and negative. It is a hybrid place, full of emotion, psycho-spiritual embodiment that informs the present and also provides a lens to Carlos’s journey, which is full of struggles.
For Mario, the unhomely consists of keeping “organic” ties to the past all while engaging the present, which requires some forms of resistance. He explains his notion of not being (and hinting at not wanting to become) a “traditional student”:

I am not a traditional student. I did not have the prior knowledge and experience visiting a campus. I did not have fraternities protecting me. I did not know where to park, where to find certain spots to do this and that. It’s a huge thing. Our prior knowledge is not part of the dialect, the dress, the way the groups hang out. I drove over 1 and ½ hours every day to get from campus back home. I had to go home to survive emotionally and psychologically.

“Traditional student” carries a series of postures and lenses that are “status quo” and associated with a social class that Mario did not want to fully commit to. As working-class student who excelled in school, part of his spiritual and psycho-emotional struggle was about affirming his past, while not becoming completely “erased.” Mario engages an ongoing set of discursive masculinities that do not conform to White, male, middle to upper-middle class norms and cultural productions of scholarly manhood. Also, he refused to join fraternities, consume frapuchinos, engage in coffee shop culture, and he left a college football game (and gave away his season tickets) after he saw that many White students were singing the songs from his university in unison. That scared him—the rituals, the codes, and the way the university expected his contribution to a university student ethos of collective consciousness. Mario does not feel included in this and does not feel power in this context. Historically, White hegemonic masculinities have centered their norms within university culture. Mario knows this and rejects many of these tenets. So for Mario, his masculinity connects to a sense of power within his embrace of the “the ghetto.” He discusses this further:

So there you are, writing and writing, knowing that you are disappearing. See and that is why Latino students drop out. That is why people drop out, I mean, that is not that radical, the idea that you don’t want to mainstream yourself.

Mainstreaming oneself means adopting hegemonic conditions in their entirety. Therefore, there is a nuanced dance between excelling in mainstream spaces of schooling all while remaining committed to the identities that more closely align with one’s working-class “home.” This tension often is exposed after years of schooling and reflection. In fact, Rodriguez argues that it is education that provides the language for speaking about one’s separation from one’s home culture (1982, p. 72). For Mario, education and writing papers reminds him of the separation from the past and costs associated with doing well in school. There is also an awareness that he is part of racially stigmatized masculinities (López, 2012). In other words, he internalizes the fact that he represents a body, a culture, a masculine set of identities, and a community that experiences racism, exclusion, and domination within higher education and in the larger society. Casillas explains some of this social context: “together with historical experiences that Latinos have had with proletarianism and colonization, the televised news representation of Latino masculinities as emasculated and exclusively immigrant works to further disenfranchise Latino
men” (2012, p. 127). Furthermore, Mario associates White, privileged manhood, as always looking to the future and seeking individual gain. As such, to be a good man and a good student, he is supposed to silence his nostalgia, get good grades, get a “good career” and move beyond his barrio ethos. Mario is committed to not being controlled or becoming a learned man on “White terms.”

Mario had to negotiate various layers about who he is, what the institutions were about, and what his role is within their graduate programs. Mario reflects:

We ain’t got no roots out there (graduate school). Even when I went ABD, I did not celebrate. When I went to do research in the library, I can’t begin to feel their relaxness. That’s envy. I wonder how that feels to go to school like it’s fun. They are really enjoying this college thing, these gringos. I can’t get with the alumni from my hood. Gringos have that alumni stuff all the time. We don’t have alumni chapter in my hood. So it’s hard to celebrate yourself. What matters more to me is that when I go to a classroom (he is a middle school principal), I share my story with the kids. They ask me why you still in school? It matters more to me that they understand that my school is not just where they play football. I pass around my ID and they trip out. I go to the campus to study, but I’m ready to get out. When I used to be their age I used to cut menudo, smell like menudo, and then go to class. I don’t know what it is to drink coffee and just study. All these approvals to get my degree. I’m just an email. They have no idea that my first semester I lived in a trailer. I paid 200 bucks a month. I was totally lost, trying to figure shit out. I’m worried about my papers and people talking about it’s going to be a good World Series, these grad students and professors I knew you know. I knew a lot about baseball but I could not even have a conversation. I didn’t feel free to make mistakes. It’s all about what comes with being able to sit on the grass, to just read next to a creek on campus. It’s that freedom that the dominant culture has.

These reflections are similar to Hoggart’s (1957) analysis of how scholarship boys embody an ambivalent relationship with institutions outside of their working-class community (i.e., universities in Mario’s case). Mario’s disorientation is intense and he is always on guard, trying to protect some aspects of his working-class consciousness or “roots.” Interestingly, some men of color protect themselves from this type of alienation by adopting “White speech” and silencing various forms of ghetto masculinity (Young, 2007). Mario plays a different card. While he still is able to earn stellar grades, he suffers in the process and protects his ghetto notion of a masculine identity.

Similarly, Carlos had a graduate school experience that brought up many moments of reflection. He comments:

In graduate school, all these people know all these buzz words. If you talk about community, they call you an activist … you can be doing all these activities and hook up with professors who be wearing a mask. You lose a little bit … some fools you can’t recognize, they lose what they came in with me. The accent, everything becomes lost. That trips me out, it’s just me being opinionated right there.
This sense of language accommodation for White comfort and acceptance comes to the surface again. Being “articulate while brown” (drawing from the concept of “articulate while Black,” see Alim & Smitherman, 2012) comes into contact with hegemonic masculinities that expect a certain type of racialized and classed approach to speech, body, and voice. As such, using barrio metaphors and even the use of barrio masculinities that connect body and words in particular ways are often threatening and looked down upon. Similarly, Carlos also told me about his coffee shop meetings with professors. This classed experience was a complete departure from his barrio community where people did not spend four dollars for a cup of coffee. Interestingly, White masculinities and Whiteness, generally, are positioned in a space of privileged invisibility (Carroll, 2011). Yet, Carlos’s unhomely identity triggers an unmasking of these virtues, values, discourses, domestication, and accepted spaces for intellectual exchanges (i.e. coffee shops).

For both Mario and Carlos, the unhomely is in part a byproduct of how a working class ethos is dominated aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1984). The love and respect for all that “home” means is often in opposition to the cultural worlds in higher education. This dialectical relationship is an ongoing struggle centered on the right for self-definition and a rejection of bounded, linear assimilation. Moreover, Mario’s and Carlos’s experiences are situated within the intersectionality of race and ethnicity, social class, and gender and provide insight into how some working-class Latino males interpret their evolving identities as “learned men.” This type of work is uniquely situated to contribute to what Mirandé (1997) contends is a long history of Latino masculinities being understudied, uncritically unpacked, and not included in any exhaustive way within mainstream masculinities research.

Home and the Prospects for Healing

To borrow from Mary J. Blige, I am a child of the 1970’s, raised in poverty and sin. We grew up ill carnal and that is part of the home experience through and through.—Carlos

Carlos spoke of coming from “sin” and the “gutter.” These metaphors served as constant reminders of where home may truly be and how to negotiate his new role as a professor. For Mario, trauma and college are interconnected:

It was a huge culture shock. The Whiteness of the university. Oh my gosh. You go down the union hall, common areas, guys playing pool. Every time someone looks at you, you wonder if they are thinking, “what are you doing here?” So it’s like you know its about Whiteness, you know your history and experiences are not there. It so huge, the gap between me and that.

Clearly, the trauma associated with being in a cultural world so different from his Mario’s class background was unsettling. He perceived his working-class home as being more “real,” as he put it. Also, while there is virtually no masculinities research on the connections between trauma and working-class Latino male identities within school settings, there are some other relevant links to this research. Specifically, some scholars have discussed how changing opportunities in the global economy and civil rights mandates have created new ways by which White men faces these risks and sense of losing privilege and opportunities (Carroll, 2011;
L. Weis, 2006). For these White men, Carroll (2011) suggests that they negotiate masculinities within new, stable, working-class realities and respond to change with discourses of victimhood and injury. For Mario, we also see his response to changes in his social environment. College facilitated the forging of new masculinities that are in constant relation to what are perceived as White forms of educated manhood. Memory, loss, trauma, and a sense of power being lost, contribute to a ghetto nerd masculinity that feels homeless and that is in search of ways to stay connected with the past and get back some kind of authority over body and mind.

The role of pain also came up amongst the scholarship boys. Mario, offered his perspective on pain:

> Our reality is so real that we feel the pain. We live the pain, it is always going to be there. So we always live in the “real world.” This is not the … artificial world, only people who can live there is the dominant culture because they have the luxury to live in the superficial world. It’s a privilege they have. We have to make a choice you know. A choice that we see as detrimental to our very purpose in the “real world.”

The “superficial world” is part of a constant struggle to live a life of dignity and agency.

Mario’s assessment also speaks to how in every social contract there is a degree of myth and metaphor guiding our conscious and unconscious towards not only an *Achievement of Desire* (Rodriguez, 1982), but the achievement of subtle and not so subtle colonization, or in its most hopeful sense, a reconfiguration of hymns, tastes, emotions, and memories, intimacy, and epistemologies. Similarly, Truong’s (2006) analysis concerning the development of Chinese American masculinities, shows that viable manhood is strongly linked to loss, alienation, and discrimination for men who are outside the hegemonic masculine ideal. With Mario, we see how the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and gender evoke the parameters by which the masculine self comes to be. This context elicits an evolving form of trauma and search for liberation.

For Carlos, his barrio roots also provided traumatic and painful memories as well as informed his future relationships. He recalls:

> We grew up in the barrio. You can tell the raza at the graduate level, the students, we can tell if they have been through the pain, through their stories. It’s like a reunion with brothers and sisters you never met when you see people that go through this stuff. You hear them and we draw a connection right away.

The stories of commonality provide a sort of access to certain people, certain decisions related to friendship. Mario also told me that roots are very much like a psychic and spiritual umbilical cord. It all informs the melancholic conflict of desire—a dedication to academic achievement and dream of a “better life” put face to face with the rawness and intimacy of the past.

Healing, while not an essentialist destination or hyper-sanitized experience, is possible. Mario explains: “To stay in the ‘success’ track only heals us if we always see and feel optimistic about social change and our impact in it.” But it’s a thing of
faith. For Mario, pursuing healing has meant that he has taken detours towards the PhD. Recently, he has recommitted himself to his community and purposefully stopped writing his proposal within the mechanical, linear expectations of his graduate program. He is spending most of his time working with social justice projects in his old neighborhood. In his strategic withdrawal, he works towards healing and getting back some power. Similar to Neal (2006) and his contention that African American males juggle many identities, like in his case, “thug-nigga-intellectual” (among other identities), we see a somewhat similar hybridity in Mario and a desire to find a space that can deal with this complexity on his terms (p. 29).

Mario and Carlos moved back “home.” They find some degree of power and healing in this decision. Unlike some lower status men who find some sense of wholeness and power by putting down women (Connell, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1994; Willis, 1977), for Mario and Carlos, women are not the parallel bodies that that require domination or humiliation for improving their status. Instead, committing to “home” provides comfort and power through a physical, socio-cultural, and symbolic rejection of hegemonic notions of educated manhood within university spheres. Hence, this form of compensatory masculinity (Collinson, 1988; Pyke, 1996) provides uneven, yet important resources for self-renewal and boosts in self-esteem.

Both Mario and Carlos are now working within their communities of origin. They are still telling stories, resisting, living, and engaging contradiction. Carlos recently won a prestigious fellowship. He has been writing and he also told me about his recent struggles with “the shit from the past.” Carlos likes being back “home” but also faces challenges for as he tells me, he often “bumps into himself.” Being in his physical home is far from comfortable, it elicits new emotions and responsibilities concerning the man he is. He faces the eeriness of time gained, time lost and a wandering spirit. Rodriguez (1982) tells of a similar scholarship boy struggle: “this boy became a man. In private now, alone, I brood over language and intimacy-the great themes of my past” (p. 32). Coming of age with sorrow and love for the past and facing the cold and monotone functions of middle-class life is a process in constant reflection. Finding the words and emotions for such a tension is laced with metaphor, poetry, and the tragicomic. For these scholarship boys, the coursework from kindergarten to college has not been all that difficult. The struggle is for the story, for values, for place. Uprooted consciousness may never get the perfect pillow sold at a strip mall. Going home, then, is an intoxicating sleepless night; immersed in the polemic, inspiring, and restless search for meaning and healing.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, the unhomely is a response to hegemonic masculinities. For Mario and Carlos unhomely masculinities capture the desire to not conform, to not “forget the past,” and the commitment to engage in bodily and ideological practice that is committed to a manhood is “down” or forever connected to the ‘hood experiences that often clashes with linear, Western, and assimilationist notions of the educated person. Yet, unlike studies that show how some working-class males reject schooling due to various commitments to classed and gendered discourses (Foley, 1990; Willis, 1977), both Mario and Carlos provide a more complex resistance that does not lead to their inability (or desire) to achieve academic success. The Latino males in this study illustrate the ambiguity and possibility for healing based on a
scholarly manhood that utilizes a working-class home as an “informant.” Healing and coping are often messy realities that are not static, but instead, ongoing responses to hegemonic threats. This information also helps them contest Whiteness and creates a practical and symbolic universe that is responsive to their notion of a “man of letters.” The development of this identity situated within social class, race and ethnicity, gender and historical-power relations. These men understand that they are part of a subordinated set of masculinities and their resistance during various points in their schooling points to their negotiations of multiple cultural worlds and the tensions associated with coming of age as “educated” brown men.

Implications for Practice

The unhomely identities of Mario and Carlos demonstrate the need for institutionalized programs that address some of the alienation and the sense of loss that these students experience. Currently, there are some quality programs within K-12 schools and universities. These include: the COBRA (Community of Brothers in Revolutionary Alliance), Project MALES (Mentoring to achieve Latino Educational Success), REAL (Respect, Excellence, Attitude, and Leadership), the Millennial Scholars program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and the Scholars’ Latino Initiative (slI) program (also at UNC-CH). These programs cover areas such as critical scaffolding of society, proactive mentoring, opportunities for peer group solidarity, guidance on the cultural norms within universities, and they leverage the use of various networks. Research confirms that these type programs do have to potential to positively impact the educational experiences of Latino males (Noguera, Hurtado & Fergus, 2012).

Future Directions for Research

If a key aspect of masculinity development centers on the importance of acquiring a sense of power, further research is needed on the possibilities of channeling feelings of unhomeliness into the development of culturally situated intellectual masculinities that elicit pride, commitment to community, and strategic decision-making around how to achieve academic success without losing one’s soul. Moreover, since hegemonic masculinities change across history, time, and context, we need to learn about how Latino ghetto nerds negotiate their subordinated masculinities across various cultural and schooling contexts.

REFERENCES


