

Telling Latina Stories

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Today in the United States the rights of people of color, specifically Hispanic people, and women and transgender individuals are under fire with these populations being told to or made to stay silent and disappear. The focus of this poster, and the larger project behind it, is to highlight and amplify the voices of Latina STEM majors and explore their navigations of their own identities in the context of their math courses. This work brings students' own self-identifications to the forefront of the conversation and examines student experiences in undergraduate mathematics. Specifically, I focus on Latina women of various Latin American backgrounds, their identity co-constructions, and how if at all it affects their experiences as doers of mathematics (Oppland-Cordell, 2013; Leyva, 2022). For students with intersectional identities, the classroom environment and peer-to-peer interactions or instructor-to-student interactions can be incredibly difficult to navigate; when individuals identify in ways other than cisgender, straight, white, and male, these racialized and gendered themes emerge (Leyva et al., 2021). Works like Adiredja and Zandieh (2020) highlight the counter-stories of women in mathematics and STEM in order to accurately portray what these women go through and how they persist in mathematical spaces where it can be easy to disappear. This project stems from my effort to not only contribute to a body of work that tells the stories of people like me, but also to join my participants in their desire to be role models for young women who want to go into STEM fields despite experiencing discouragement and silence. This project explores the question: *how do Latina women in STEM majors feel in Calculus I courses and do those feelings affect the negotiation of their identities as math doers, STEM majors, and Hispanic women?*

Over the course of this study, I interviewed six women ages 18 and 19 from a variety of STEM majors who are currently taking Calculus I. The initial interviews focused on forming initial student profiles about each woman's background and how they perceive three main aspects of their identity: (a) their identities as Hispanic or Latina, (b) their identities as women, and (c) their identities as doers of mathematics. After being asked directly about their experience with racism or sexism in the math classroom, the majority of the women interviewed were able to either explicitly describe an instance of racism or sexism they saw or experienced in their schooling or mentioned taking note of racialized or gendered experiences. Furthermore, at least two women mentioned refusing to stay silent or make themselves smaller in the face of these experiences. For the women who identified explicit racist or sexist encounters, they expressed finding comfort in their support systems of family or roommates and friends who would hear them out and let them vent their frustration in the face of these aggressions. Preliminary results provide insights into what participants' responses are to discrimination inside and outside of the classroom and evidence of how they view themselves and the different intersections of their identities. Potential implications of this work in the research world encourage more lived experience storytelling for Latina STEM majors, the public will hear more voices of women in STEM, and Latina women and girls can see and hear the stories of women like them to show what is possible.

References

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