

“Dolls that look like us”: An Analysis of Latina Mothers Practicing Concerted Cultivation

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Comments:

Through analysis of original data, eighteen interviews with middle-class Latina mothers, this paper seeks to highlight the deficiencies in Annette Lareau’s highly regarded concept of concerted cultivation. By situating herself nicely amongst existing research and theory, Acosta argues for a more intersectional approach to studying the intergenerational transmission of social class and social identity using cultural objects, namely “dolls that look like us.”

This paper links two previously studied social processes: concerted cultivation and identity development via cultural objects. It seeks to understand the way that concerted cultivation is carried out via cultural objects by a previously understudied population—middle-class Latina mothers. Acosta asks if and how dolls act as a means for transmitting both desirable skills and traits as well as a socially advantageous identity from mother to daughter. Furthermore, Acosta seems to point to two somewhat conflicting outcomes of the concerted cultivation process. On the one hand, Latina mothers seek to prepare their daughters to exist in a white, middle-class dominated world while also fostering a Latina identity.

I appreciated the inclusion of a discussion of the differences between ethnicity and race. It helps the reader get into an ambiguous mindsight. Race and ethnicity are used interchangeably by some and others point out their important differences. However, having the knowledge that many Latinas do not differentiate between them made the transition into Acosta’s findings much smoother. I do wonder why the mothers interviewed were asked to racially identify if Acosta had already established that race and ethnicity are used interchangeably by many Latinas. She states that ten women identified as white, which seems to further complicate the issues of race and ethnicity when it comes to the social identity that Latina mothers are trying to transmit to their daughters. I think the reader would benefit from a more complete understanding of why these self-identifications matter in the scope of the overall project.

Acosta described some mothers with fairer daughters expressing concern with how they would relate to their daughters since they may not share the same social identity. It appears they still tried to pass on a Latina identity but if their daughters are perceived as white, this may create conflict. I think that this could be a follow-up to this study and should be addressed as future research in the conclusion.

I had a few questions and comments that might be helpful when revising this paper for publication.

1) You have stated that Lareau found mothers acted as the primary gatekeepers in the concerted cultivation process, thus she must have paid some attention to gender. You then stated that subsequent research showed concerted cultivation varied across gender identity. Did Lareau not address this in her study at all or was it inadequate? It would be clearer if you addressed what Lareau said about gender specifically.

2) What is the process that turns cultural capital into a social identity? At what point does cultural capital turn into a unique social identity?

3) Did any of the mothers you interviewed purposefully purchase white dolls for their daughters? I'm wondering if any mothers were not trying to transmit a Latina social identity, but were instead trying to transmit a white social identity to their daughters.

4) Did you interview any mothers who were not American-born? I wonder if your results would have been different if the mothers were born abroad.