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LATINA GRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN STEM

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Latina Graduate Students' Experiences in STEM

Synopsis:

This study provides an in-depth understanding of the risk and protective factors that ten Latina graduate students encountered in their STEM programs at a selective university. Risk factors included unsupportive professors and experiencing microaggressions. Protective factors included having a positive academic socialization experience and having a network of supportive mentors. These results may inform the creation of stronger interventions for underrepresented students in STEM fields.

Latina Graduate Students' Experiences in STEM

Latinas are significantly underrepresented in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. This study focuses on the academic resilience of Latinas who have chosen to enter and remain in STEM fields. Academic resilience is defined as the ability to succeed in academic environments and is attributed to a number of personal traits and external factors. Critical concepts to consider when investigating academic resilience include risk factors and protective factors. Ten Latina graduate students in science or engineering fields completed an online survey and a one-on-one interview. The audio files were open-coded using a grounded theory approach. Potential risk factors for this population included: no parental expectations to complete graduate school, experiencing microaggressions, and lack of accessible female mentors. Potential protective factors included: high levels of parental support, parental expectations to attend college and earn a degree, the presence of a caring mentor in high school, interaction with engineers, and strong relationships with mentors and advisors, regardless of gender.