



Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference
Latinos in the Heartland:
Migration and Shifting Human Landscapes

A multistate conference about integration of immigrants
June 8-10, 2011 in Kansas City, Missouri

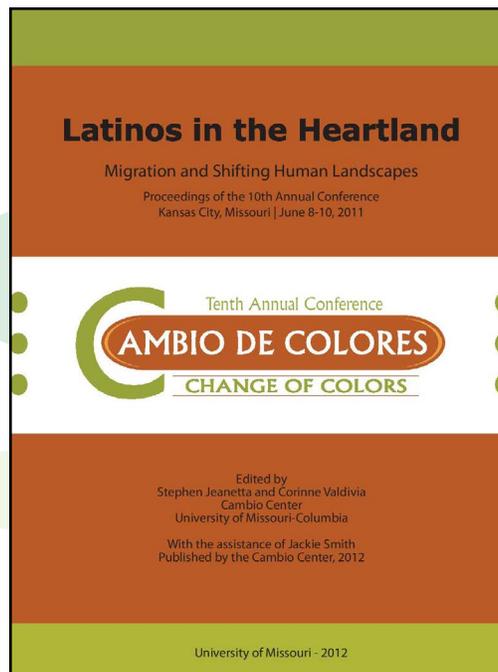
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Latina's Educational Endeavors Past, Present and Future

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Keywords: Latino education, Latino social capital, educational development

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Abstract

Thirty years ago, MANA de Kansas City was established as a grassroots organization promoting social capital and educational development for Latinas in the Kansas City metropolitan area. This grass roots organization promotes higher education through scholarships, and provides resources that support and enable Latinas to increase their personal and professional leadership skills, advocacy, and educational endeavors. MANA de KC encourages networking, develops leadership skills, advocates about issues affecting Hispanics, and encourages young Latinas to become future leaders. Membership for MANA de KC is open to anyone that wants to support Latinas and MANA's mission. MANA de KC's members are diverse individuals from different walks of life, interests, careers, educational levels, and lifestyles. The common thread is that they all support the mission to empower Latinas through leadership development, community service, and advocacy. MANA de KC is making a difference in the Kansas City Metropolitan area as they continue to promote higher education for Latinas.

Introduction

In 1981, the MANA de Kansas City chapter was formed as an all volunteer organization from the MANA National, a Latina organization founded in 1974 as the Mexican American National Association in Washington D.C. In January 1994, members voted to become known as MANA, a National Latina Organization to reflect the growing diversity of its members and become more inclusive of Latinas from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Central America, South America, and Spain. The word MANA is short for hermana, which means sister. As of today, MANA is the largest national Latina organization that is inclusive of Latina networks throughout the United States who value service, advocacy, leadership development and higher education. MANA focuses on creating community leaders through personal and professional development and they influence public policy issues that are relevant to Latinas and their families.

This year (2011), MANA de KC is celebrating 30 years of work in the Kansas City metropolitan area. One year after MANA de KC formed, it awarded their first Latina Community Service Award, honoring two Latinas. In 1993, MANA de KC awarded the first scholarship to assist Latinas in their pursuit of higher education. Examples of other activities in which MANA de KC has been involved include: 1) supporting the Posada Del Sol Christmas celebration for seniors; 2) sponsoring the Hermanitas (little sisters) Program as mentors; and 3) encourage young Latinas to stay in school and become actively engaged with community organizations that promote Hispanics in the community.

Ever since its inception, MANA de KC has been "dedicated to developing Latina leaders in Kansas City, promoting equal participation of Latinas in the community and working to create a better quality of life for all." MANA has been described as an organization that provides spaces for dialogue and highly values its member's resources and talents. MANA de KC instills pride in Latina culture and heritage and provides tools and guidance for individuals and community success. MANA de KC's common denominator is placing a high value to the words: service, advocacy, and leadership. For three decades, MANA de KC has organized numerous activities, programs, and projects that promote its mission. Through the establishment of various partnerships, MANA de KC has been able to reach into Kansas City communities integrating its purpose and mission. To promote educational development opportunities for Latinas, MANA de KC has hosted educational workshops, training, seminars, and coordinated programs

that promote the advancement of Latinas. MANA de KC also hosts *Platicas* (talks) that are social capital building events that bring women together to share, network, and further develop their personal and professional influences.

In 2010, the MANA de KC Executive Board voted to donate their historical documents to the University of Missouri Kansas City Millers Nichols Library LaBudde Special Collections to ensure the preservation and historical integrity of their legacy. The articles were given to the LaBudde Special Collections and are archived at the library for safekeeping and historical preservation for future generations. The MANA de KC documents will be there for years to come and students, researchers, and community members have access to this collection, as we did in writing this paper. MANA de KC can add to the collection as new generations of leaders emerge. By viewing these historical documents, one can learn more about MANA de KC and the influences these Latinas have in the Kansas City region. The inclusive dates of the original donation includes materials at the library that range from 1977 to 2008, with the bulk of the materials dating from 1990 to 2008. The collection is divided into thirteen series, each one focusing on a different aspect of the organization. For this research, we concentrated on the series related to MANA de KC's scholarship and leadership program, as well as their community development efforts. The collection also includes a digital photo album that is available online.

Mana de KC's Organizational Strategy

Scope and Activities:

Overall MANA de KC members have served on various boards and commissions throughout Missouri and their presence as Hispanic leaders in this urban area is clear. In addition, MANA de KC members have served and continue to serve on the MANA National Board. MANA de KC has also been a resource for distributing and acquiring information to Hispanic families in the Kansas City metropolitan area. In addition, MANA de KC has developed its influence in supporting and promoting community service, advocacy, leadership development and higher education.

Strategies of how MANA de KC has supported its members' personal and professional development include: 1) recognition and promotion; 2) empowerment; and 3) educational advancement. From the recognition perspective, one of the first projects directed by MANA de KC was the public recognition of Latinas for their community involvement they received the Community Service Award. Within the realm of empowerment characteristics, MANA de KC has coordinated a vast amount of informative seminars, workshops, symposiums, and conferences that have included empowerment initiatives that strengthen bonds with national and local organizations such as, the Midwest Latina Conference, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Ford Foundation, and Alianzas, a program of University of Missouri Extension and University of Missouri Kansas City Institute for Human Development. In the area of educational development skills, MANA de KC has awarded numerous scholarships to deserving Latinas to further their higher educational advancement. MANA de KC has also sponsored Hermanitas program that is designed to mentor and support middle and high school Latinas. Their goal is to improve academic and testing skills, civic involvement in their respective communities and schools, and to develop leadership skills to help young Latinas focus on problem solving and critical thinking skills as they maneuver through life's challenges. The following sub-sections provide a more descriptive perspective of the activities MANA de KC has supported to promote Latinas in the region.

Recognition and Promotion Strategies:

In 1982, MANA de KC awarded the first Latina Community Service Awards honoring two Latinas. By 1995, a total of 28 recipients had been awarded that recognition for their continued service to improve conditions for Latinas in the greater Kansas City Latina community and in so doing they inspired others to emulate their example. The awards were presented in various ceremonies organized in collaboration with other local organizations. The Community Development Award (CDA) was given in 2004 to an outstanding community member who contributed to the Hispanic communities. The award nominations

were considered from the following categories: 1) arts/entertainment; 2) community service; 3) corporate employers; 4) education; 5) professional development; 6) religion; and 7) students.

Also, in 2004, MANA de KC collaborated with the Kansas Heritage Foundation and recognized six individuals who made a difference in the city of Topeka, Kansas for their support to the Hispanic community. In 2005, four community advocates were publicly acknowledged for their work. Six individuals received the CDA award in 2006, and eight in 2007, for their individual efforts to support the greater Kansas City Hispanic community and promoting a diverse workplace environment.

In an effort to further promote their community advocacy strategies, in 2002 Leonor Solis proposed an annual fundraising event to the MANA de KC Executive Board, that would be their own. She concluded that other non-profits in the area host successful annual fundraisers. She suggested that a Latina fashion show would be a fun way to provide MANA de KC an opportunity to recognize Latinas in the community for their work, while allowing them the opportunity to raise scholarship support for Latinas and to further advance their mission to promote higher education. The board agreed and decided that the theme for the fashion show was to reflect the Hispanic culture of Kansas City, and the models must be Latinas who are role models and mentors in their communities. The fashion show was named *Moda Latina* and it provided a venue exposing MANA de KC to a broader audience creating awareness about the Hispanic economic power and leadership in the region. More than 100 Latinas have participated and modeled in the runways of *Moda Latina*. The volunteers are the backbone of these successful fundraising events helping MANA de KC raise funds for Latina scholarships. *Moda Latina* also provides social networking venues to improve community development efforts in the KC metropolitan area. The last *Moda Latina* was held in 2009 at the Pierson Auditorium University of Missouri Kansas City where MANA de KC raised enough money to award three Latina Scholarships.

Strategies of Empowerment:

Members of MANA de KC have attended and organized various events promoting empowerment, such as the Adelante Mujer Symposium, the Ford Fellowship program, the Platicas, and the Leadership Development Training. In 2008, MANA de KC was selected to participate in *AvanZamos*, a Ford Fellowship program in Orlando, Florida. For six years, MANA de KC received funding from the Ford Motor Company to participate in *AvanZamos*, an opportunity that further developed their leadership skills. *AvanZamos* was designed to train community leaders, to strengthen their mentoring skills and apply them in their respective communities. The *Hermanitas* program is a mentoring program where MANA de KC members serve as *Madrinas* (mentors) and the *Hermanitas* receive training on personal leadership and organizational skills. In 2008, MANA members attended the 2008 Annual Education and Training Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. Three *Platicas* titled, "Diversity in the Workplace", were organized in 2007. That same year, MANA de KC held a Latina Leadership Workshop that provided information on parliamentary procedures, applied the Myers-Briggs personality test, and included a Latina panel that shared scientific research and local political developments in Kansas City. In 2008, the Latina Leadership Series were organized featuring "Women with Wings" that featured various Latinas from the community that had maintained leadership roles as politicians, university professors, researchers, entrepreneurs and community leaders.

Strategies for Development Skills:

In addition of allocating scholarships to deserving Latinas to help advance their educational goals, MANA has supported the *Hermanitas* program. This leadership initiative provides an educational business model that enables at-risk students with leadership abilities to eliminate obstacles and improve areas of scholastic curriculum: reading, math, science, history, and critical thinking. This program has targeted Latina students to provide them stability for future endeavors at post secondary education. Furthermore, *Hermanitas* tackles issues associated with overall health and wellbeing such as, eating disorders, exercise, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and depression. They strive to help Latinas find solutions to empower them through the networks and connections with

Hispanic mentors in their respective communities. In the 1990's, the curriculum was expanded to include workshops related to: building self-esteem, future financial planning, substance abuse, career building, diversity, the family units, and cultural awareness enhancing the academic modalities in reading, math science, public speaking, developing good study habits, how to apply for scholarships and recycling.

In 1990, the Hermanitas held a "Stay in School Project" conference focused on self-esteem and self-responsibility through personal stories from successful women. In 2004 Hermanitas applied for support from the Sprint Achievement program to establish a structure for weekly tutoring and biweekly evening meetings at the Argentine Middle School. The program would include a variety of weekly and monthly activities, biweekly evening meeting with mentors, field trips to health fairs, and visits to the Kansas state capital in Topeka. In 2007, MANA de KC applied for a grant from the Women's Foundation of Greater Kansas City to hire a bilingual, bicultural coordinator to support the development and programming of the Hermanitas program. Funding was not received. Nonetheless, MANA de KC is committed to the continued support of the Hermanitas initiatives. A review of the attendance sheets and registration at events revealed that at least 35 Hermanitas have participated and received support in the last ten years from MANA de KC.

Conclusions

MANA de KC is an integral entity as a best practice organization in the Kansas City community. They champion their mission to empower Latinas through leadership development, community service, and advocacy. Evaluating educational trends is important as MANA de KC promotes educational advancement, and when we compared the Missouri Department of Education High School graduation rates for 2006-2010 we learned that in Missouri, Hispanics have an overall lower High School graduation percentage rate when compared to non-Hispanics. However, for the Kansas City Metropolitan area, the United States Census American Community Survey indicates that for 2009, the percentage of Hispanic High School graduates was 30% when compared to 27.7% for non-Hispanics. This means that the High School graduation percentage rates for Hispanics in the greater Kansas City area is better compared to non-Hispanics and that difference can be attributed to the efforts of MANA de KC and other Hispanic-serving organizations that promote and encourage youth to stay in school. MANA de KC continues to collaborate and promote higher educational endeavors for all Hispanic youth. Nonetheless, their mission and primary focus is promoting and supporting the advancement of Latinas through leadership development, community service and advocacy. MANA de KC reinforces their mission through educational scholarships for Latinas in the greater Kansas City area. You can join MANA de KC in supporting their mission and developing future Latina leaders.

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