

# Latina/o/x Criminology

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## Scholar Spotlight

### Latina/o/x Criminology (LC)

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Signature Contribution: "Out-of-School Suspensions: Counter-Narratives from the Student Perspective"  
<https://www.qualitativecriminology.com/pub/v8i3p1/release/4>

Dr. Zahra Shekarkhar's Faculty page:  
<https://www.uncfsu.edu/academics/colleges-schools-and-departments/college-of-humanities-and-social-sciences/department-of-criminal-justice/criminal-justice-faculty-and-staff/zahra-shekarkhar>

Zahra Shekarkhar graduated with her BA in Criminology from the University of Miami in 2006 and received both her MA and PhD in Criminology from the University of Florida. She has over 16 publications related to her research agenda which explores how race, ethnicity, immigration, and gender intersect with social contexts to produce disparities in offending and victimization among youth.

The LC seeks to exchange, promote, and disseminate information that contribute to the criminological knowledge and understanding of the rapidly growing Latina/o/x population.

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**Dr. Zahra Shekarkhar**

QJJC VOLUME 8 ISSUE 3 (SPRING 2020)

#### **OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS: COUNTER-NARRATIVES FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE**

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#### **Abstract**

Out-of-school suspension (OSS) is a major disciplinary tool that has impacted large numbers of students in the United States. Most research into OSS has drawn exclusively on data collected from school records and other "official" sources, and this body of work has contributed to our understanding of suspension decisions by school officials. Considerably less is known about how students experience out-of-school suspensions. This line of inquiry is important because it captures the student voice and reveals a series of counter-narratives that offer alternative interpretations of students' behaviors that lead to OSS. The aims of this study were twofold: 1) to explore the backgrounds and contexts of the behaviors for which students were suspended, and 2) to examine the degree to which suspension practices reflected criminal justice processes. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 26 students who had experienced at least one OSS during the previous 18 months. Collectively, they had been suspended from 10 different public high schools in one county. The sample was largely African American and male. Respondents provide important contextual details about the events as they describe their role, frustration over subjective infractions, labeling, and concerns about limited due process.

*Keywords:* school suspension, school discipline, zero tolerance

<sup>1</sup> **Acknowledgment:** We are grateful to the youth and young adults who participated in this study. Thank you for sharing your stories. **Correspondence:** to Karen McElrath, Department of Criminal Justice, Fayetteville State University, 1200 Marchison Road, Fayetteville, NC 28301 (email: [kmceln1@uncfsu.edu](mailto:kmceln1@uncfsu.edu)).