

Epilogue: Towards a Tipping Point ^[1]

Submitted by [Mónica Ivelisse Feliú-Mójer](#) ^[2] on 23 October 2014 - 10:40pm



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You can read this blog in Spanish [here](#) ^[3].

Over the last few weeks, in celebration of [National Hispanic Heritage Month](#) ^[4], I have shared the work of organizations or projects that empower young Latinas to pursue and thrive in careers in

science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) [see posts [here](#) [5], [here](#) [6] and [here](#) [7]].

If you can't already tell, this is a topic I am deeply passionate about, partly because it is personal. As a girl growing up in rural Puerto Rico I was very interested in everything STEM but knew very little about careers in the field and had no female role models in these disciplines until I got to college. Thankfully, that did not stop me from becoming a scientist.

But unfortunately, many Latina girls are discouraged from pursuing STEM careers and lose interest in these disciplines as early as middle school [8]. This is why early intervention programs like [Latinas in STEM](#) [9], [DIY Girls](#) [10], the [Verizon Innovative App Challenge](#) [11], [Techbridge Girls](#) [12] and the [National Girls Collaborative Project](#) [13], among others, are key to increasing the representation of Latinas in the STEM workforce.

Nevertheless, even after we become STEM professionals, Latinas continue to face [challenges](#) [14] including a lack of role models/mentors, the [double bind](#) [15], lower salaries and tokenism, to mention a few. These challenges often mean that Latinas in STEM (as well as other underrepresented minority women) have to work twice as hard to get half the recognition. Thus, organizations and movements that support and empower Latina STEM professionals are important to ensure our continued success.

Making Latinas visible

I am used to being one of a few or the only Latina with a STEM degree almost everywhere I go. But on October 3rd, 2014, at the [Latinas Think Big Innovation Summit](#) [16] held at Google HQ, I was surrounded by over 300 accomplished and aspiring Latina leaders in STEM and innovation. It was empowering.

"I want the world to 'see' Latinas are the new face of innovation, and bring attention to the work Latinas are doing across STEM fields," said Dr. Angelica Perez-Litwin's, founder of Latinas Think Big.

A roomful of tech entrepreneurs, innovators, scientists, engineers, students, government officials, executives and influencers came ready to connect, dialogue and network. We had conversations about many topics including fundraising, startups, disruptive models, professional advancement, and the state of Latino/a education, among others.

We heard from Latina innovators like Lisa Morales-Hellebo (who built a [platform](#) [17] to meet and connect with Latino/a tech founders) and Oli Bichell (founder of [TiKidTic](#) [18], an organization leveraging technology to educate children in poor rural communities in the Dominican Republic) who are effecting change through technology.

Coming full circle, the Summit also included mentoring sessions for Latina high schools students with some of the professionals in attendance. "They can't be you if they can't see you," said Dr. Frances Colón, Acting Science and Technology Advisor for the United States Secretary of State, who was the morning keynote speaker.

Elevating the conversation and catalyzing change

Movements like Latinas Think Big offer necessary communities of support, give visibility and elevate the conversation about the important roles of Latinas in STEM and innovation. They help build a critical mass so that we can build momentum towards a tipping point.

However, the issues faced by Latinas in STEM will not be solved by Latinas alone. The underrepresentation of Latinas in STEM is detrimental to the advancement of science and innovation, and to society. Therefore, **everyone** has a role in changing the state of affairs, particularly those in positions of influence and privilege.

The support of tech giants like Google (where Latinas are just 1% of the workforce ^[19] and seriously underrepresented) for initiatives like the Latinas Think Big Summit is a step in the right direction, but not enough. We have a long road of cultural and structural changes to achieve equity.

And these changes will not just happen. Karma ^[20] won't take care of them and we can't wait for the system to just give us what we deserve. The reality is that Latinas will have to play an important role in creating awareness and catalyzing change. That's why initiatives like Latinas Think Big are so important. They empower us to speak up, grab a sit at the table; they empower us to blaze the trail.

Watch the morning session of the Latinas Think Big Innovation Summit:

Watch the afternoon session of the Latinas Think Big Innovation Summit:

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