

Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association
August 6-9, 2009 ~ Toronto, Canada

Latino Male Undergraduates' Educational Experiences, Coping, and Use of Spirituality

Marla Delgado, M.S.

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Araceli Mejía, M.S.

Arizona State University

Vanessa L. Martinez, M.S.

Washington State University

Andrea C. Salazar, B.A.

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Cecilia M. Nieves

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Laura G. Perez

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Alberta M. Gloria, Ph.D. (amgloria@wisc.edu)

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jeanett Castellanos, Ph.D. (castellj@uci.edu)

University of California, Irvine

Please do not quote or cite without previous permission of authors

Abstract

An exploration of Latino male undergraduates' educational experiences, this study sought to understand better their experiences and subsequent coping responses. The study used a qualitative approach implementing semi-structured interviews to attain the narratives of five Latino undergraduates attending a predominantly White Midwestern institution. Using the psychosociocultural framework (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000), the emergent themes were identified within the dimensions of psychological, social, and cultural. Interviews ranged from 45 to 75 minutes and included questions about demographic information, educational experiences, coping strategies, and use of spirituality. Emergent psychological themes were experiencing stressors, coping, not succumbing to stereotypes, exploring and discovering oneself, and relying on spirituality. Emergent social themes included receiving support, relating to peers, making social comparisons, feeling a sense of sameness, and flying under the radar. Emergent cultural themes were living two cultural worlds, adjusting to new settings, maintaining culture, having a collective consciousness, personifying *si se puede*, and preserving religion. Discussion of themes and subsequent implications are addressed.

Latino Male Undergraduates in Higher Education

- Underrepresented at all educational levels (Pew, 2009)
- Latinos enroll and graduate at lower rates than their Latina counterparts (NCES, 2009)
 - In 2001-2002, Latinos earned fewer bachelors degrees (6.0%) than Latinas (6.7%) (NCES, 2003)
 - Only racial and gender group whose participation has declined from approximately 27% to 22% (NCES, 2005)
 - Described as “vanishing” from higher education (Sanez & Ponjuan, 2009)
 - Contend with feelings of marginalization, isolation, and inadequacy (Boyer & Castellanos et al., 2006)
 - Experience hostile campus climates and negative stereotypes (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, in press; Kamimura, 2005; Vera Sanchez, 2005)

Negotiating and Coping in Higher Education

- Contend with cultural expectations of fulfilling different roles as Latino males within their families and communities (Gloria et al., in press; Quijada, 2005)
- Previous research not sex-specific, revealing planned and direct coping responses (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987)
- Latino males more likely to depend on themselves, instead of relying on others (Vásquez & Garcia-Vásquez, 1995)
- Latina undergraduates use active and planned coping (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco) whereas Latino counterparts drew upon their past experiences, with emotion-focused coping most predictive of psychological well-being (Gloria et al., in press)
- Latino males use more individualistic and isolation-based approaches for coping, implementing spirituality and religious practices as a means of adjustment, resilience, and persistence (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008)

Psychosociocultural Theoretical Framework

- Considers complex interdependence of psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of Latina/o students’ experiences within context of university environment (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000)
- Empirically-validated model with different Latina/o undergraduate populations (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005)
- Each dimension uniquely and collectively accounts for students educational experiences

Study’s Purpose and Research Questions

To explore specifically Latino male undergraduates’ experiences given their underrepresentation and challenging educational processes in higher education

- To investigate daily-lived educational experiences in higher education
- To assess coping responses to their educational experiences
- To identify the use of spirituality as part of their educational coping

Procedure and Setting

- IRB-approved study conducted at large Midwest, predominantly White institution
- Recruitment simultaneous to larger separately-conceptualized research project from Latino/a based student organizations, informal networks, and academic programs
- Interviews audio-taped, ranging 45 minutes to 75 minutes in length
- Incentives (snacks, refreshments) provided

Student Participants

5 Latino males

Age

19 to 24 ($M = 21.60$; $SD = 1.60$)

Class Standing

- 2 Juniors
- 1 Senior
- 2 Graduating Seniors

Self-reported Ethnicity

- 1 Mexican American
- 1 Mexican
- 1 Argentinean
- 1 American Nicaraguan
- 1 Puerto Rican and White

US Immigration Status

- 3 First-generation
- 1 Second-generation
- 1 Third-generation

College Status

- 2 First-generation
- 3 Second-generation

Family Educational Attainment

- 2 had at least one parent who earned college degree
- 4 had at least one sibling had either completed or was currently enrolled in college

Interview Protocol

Demographic questions (i.e., age, ethnicity, sex, class standing, generation to the U.S. and college, parental and sibling education)

- *Educational Experience*: As a [self-referent, e.g., Mexican American], what has been your educational experience like on this campus?
- *Coping*: How do you cope with your educational experiences?
- *Use of Spirituality*: How do you use religion/spirituality to cope with your experiences as a student?

Analytical Procedures

- Implemented Le Compte and Schensul's (1999) multi-step analyses of qualitative data
- Used semi-structure interview protocol
- 2 teams (interview team, analyses team)
- Analyzed narratives line by line to determine within and between emergent themes
- Synthesized themed data to develop overarching themes
- Developed Latino male undergraduate composite profile to elucidate emergent and overarching themes as per the psychosociocultural (PSC) theoretical framework (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000)

Emergent Themes

Psychological

- ***Experiencing Stressors:*** Range of educational stressors: intrapersonal (self-doubt, lonely only), academic (no role models, lack of knowledge of resources), financial (working multiple jobs to meet basic survival needs), balancing multiple obligations (burning the candle at both ends), and hostile racial campus climate (racism)
- ***Coping:*** Different approaches Latino males used to manage stressors and educational experiences: support (peer support), enjoyable hobbies (swimming), reframing negative events, learning about one's culture, spirituality, prayer, and utilizing unique responses (putting on a mean face)
- ***Not Succumbing to Stereotypes:*** Not letting negative stereotypes get in the way of academic goals and educational success
- ***Exploring and Discovering Oneself:*** Process by which Latino males made sense of who they were as cultural beings during their academic journey
- ***Relying on Spirituality:*** Internal perspective that focuses on a higher power (Something greater than me)

Social

- ***Receiving Support:*** Level of support received from family, peers, and university faculty and staff
- ***Relating to Peers:*** Negative social interactions with peers including feelings of marginalization
- ***Making Social Comparisons:*** Comparing self to others (White peers) academic preparedness, financial resources, and level of work required for success
- ***Feeling Sense of Sameness:*** Feeling a connection with like-minded and like-cultured campus peers
- ***Flying Under the Radar:*** Being able to navigate campus despite cultural incongruities (blending in phenotypically, having a non-distinguishable accent)

Cultural

- ***Living Two Cultural Worlds:*** The bargaining between mainstream culture and Latinos' own ethnic background
- ***Adjusting to New Setting:*** The process by which Latinos acclimate to the university setting that is often culturally incongruent
- ***Maintaining Culture:*** Sense of obligation and responsibility to maintain cultural values, traditions and language, as Latinos enter into a new world of higher education
- ***Having a Collective Consciousness:*** Collectivistic cultural values influencing Latinos' journey through higher education (decision-making processes, defining success, future goals and planning)
- ***Personifying Si Se Puede!:*** Sense of motivation to continue on and accomplish one's goal with cultural pride
- ***Preserving Religion:*** Learning about religion to better connect with their cultural/ethnic history

Composite Profile of Latino Male Undergraduate: “Luis”

Luis is a 22 year old senior who self-identifies as a Mexican American attending a predominantly-White university in the Midwest. His parents did not attend college; however, he has and an older brother who is also currently attending college. As a first-generation college student, Luis had little awareness of college demands and quickly realized he was not as fully prepared and had less access to resources in comparison to his White peers. In particular, he observed the gradual transitions his peers experienced entering college as they understood the university system and seemed to effortlessly get good grades, have lots of time to socialize, and rarely worry about money and family. His experiences were in stark contrast to other students as he juggled multiple obligations of holding two jobs at which he worked over 20 hours, visited home each weekend per his family request, and studied whenever possible, leaving little time to socialize with his friends.

Luis’ multiple obligations require considerable time and energy often leading to physical and mental exhaustion, not allowing him to concentrate on his academics. As a result, he missed numerous classes and did not perform up to his highest ability, leading to him being placed on academic probation. Feeling somewhat frustrated about his need to work more than study in order to get an education, Luis questioned whether he had what it takes to “survive” the university. His self-doubt has been further magnified by several racially hostile events where he has been verbally harassed being told to “go back to Mexico.”

With a need to share his reality, Luis sought support and validation from other Latino groups and peers. He found support by joining diversity programs and attending cultural events. These programs assisted Luis in the process but did not nurture his self-confidence, nor could his peers provide the professional assistance needed. With few Latinos resources available on campus, Luis was uncertain of whom to turn to for formal support and guidance despite having peer support. After substantial efforts of seeking guidance, Luis found one Latino advisor who functioned as a mentor, role model, and father figure for him and numerous other Latino students.

To deal with his educational stress, Luis often swims or plays baseball in an attempt to re-channel his energy and keep his eye of the prize (graduation). When he first came to school, he felt particularly stressed before an exam and called his mother who reminded him to “pray to Dios and everything will be okay.” Finding comfort in his mothers’ words, Luis prayed before taking exams or when feeling overwhelmed by his schoolwork throughout his college years. Getting ready to graduate, Luis feels a sense of pride that he will advance his community by being the first Latino college graduate in his family and neighborhood.

Cumulative Discussion and Implications

Latino males have substantially stressful and challenging daily-lived educational experiences in which their self-beliefs, relationship to others, and centralization of culture are salient to their academic persistence.

- Latino male stressors ranged from limited academic preparation, financial barriers, to educational time constraints where they responded to situations by actively coping, making opportunities out of loss, and implementing strategies to gain knowledge of environment and “rules” for personal adjustment and academic success.
 - *Because of the potential to internalize negative perceptions or challenges, clinicians or student service personnel need to explore specifically what Latino*

male students' self-beliefs are to support healthy and cultural strength-based thinking and interacting.

- Social relations with non-Latinos emphasized constant comparisons, which led to the realization of their limited social influence and discrepancy of resources. As such, the need to seek similar peers, peer groups, ethnic-specific programs, and faculty was heightened.
 - *Universities must attend to growing underrepresentation of Latinos on campus leading to a sense of invisibility (vanishing Latino male). Ethnic-specific programs and networking systems could assist in development of ethnic enclaves and professional spaces to provide academic resources and cultural and social validation.*
- The bargaining and straddling of two worlds is central to Latino male educational experiences leading them to cultural exploration, self-education, maintenance, and preservation.
 - *For universities to engage a context of diversity, they must have accountable commitment to provide academic and social venues at which Latino male undergraduates can explore, reinforce, and maintain their values.*

Limitations ~ Future Research

- Non-random sample comprised of upper classman students who may not reflect the full developmental range of Latino student experiences, needs, and processes ~ Interview Latino males from all class standings and/or conduct longitudinal study to determine developmental time-sequential changes and needs
- Gender of interviewers may have influenced participant disclosure (masked challenges, limit level of vulnerability) ~ Assure same-sex, same-ethnicity interviewers to facilitate rapport and increase specificity of information
- Gender-proscribed roles of being a Latino male not explicitly addressed in relationship to educational experiences ~ Determine extent to which culture- and gender-emphasized values influence type of stressors and coping responses implemented