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## Latino male undergraduates' well-being: Cultural fit and coping responses

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### Abstract

Given that Latino men and their unique educational experiences are rarely studied separately from their Latina counterparts, this study addressed Latino men's perceptions of their educational environment, cultural congruity within the university environment, and how their coping responses predicted their subsequent well-being. Participants ( $N = 100$ ) were primarily first-generation students whose most commonly reported coping response was actively finding out more about the situation and taking a positive planned action, followed by drawing upon past experiences. The least frequently used coping responses were to seek professional advice and to pray or consult with a priest/minister. Cultural congruity and the coping response of taking a planned positive approach were most predictive of psychological well-being.

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## Latina/os in Higher Education

- Latina/os account for 10% of the 16.6 million U.S. college students (NCES, 2003)
  - 6.4% of the total conferred bachelor degrees in 2001-2002
  - Latino males earn fewer bachelors degrees (6.0%) than Latinas (6.7%) (NCES, 2003)
- 18-24 year old Latino men are the only group (as compared to Latinas and White and African American men and women) whose postsecondary matriculation has declined over the past thirty years (27% to 22%) (NCES, 2005)
  - Latinos are underrepresented in institution of higher education
- Latino males encounter unique challenges different from their Latina counterparts
  - Cultural misfit within university setting (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004)
  - Perceived barriers (Hurtado & Carter, 1997)
  - Decreased sense of self (Hernandez, Cervantes, Castellanos, & Gloria, 2004)
  - Emphasis to fulfill gender roles regarding family responsibilities (Ramirez, in press; Veras Sanchez, in press)

### Coping Responses

- One's general tendency to manage or alter negative stressful events by thinking and acting in a particular manner (Struthers, 1995)
- Latina/o students generally employ direct and active coping strategies to manage educational and personal stress
  - Late immigrant students, who experienced higher acculturative stress, reported taking a direct, planned action (individualistic) approach to coping, while second and third generation students more frequently coped by talking to others about the problem (relying on their social network) (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987)
  - Mexican American college students ( $n = 120$ ) most commonly employed a direct planned approach or talked to others as a way of coping with acculturative stress (Vazquez & Garcia-Vazquez, 1995)
  - Latina undergraduates ( $n = 98$ ) reported feeling culturally congruent with their academic environment and took planned, positive action, both of which were strong predictors of general psychological well-being (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005)

### Well-Being:

- Psychological well-being conceptualized as six mutually-exclusive domains of wellness (Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations With Others, Purpose in Life, Self-Acceptance) (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995)
- Research on the functioning and general well-being of REM college students, especially with Latino male college students is sparse
  - In a qualitative analysis, first-year and predominantly first generation Latina/o, Asian American, African American, and mixed heritage college students ( $n = 30$ ) who most successfully coped with stress did not feel they lacked social support (Phinney & Hass, 2003)
  - Efficacy expectations led to greater physical and psychological well-being for 164 Mexican American and Latina/o undergraduates (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997)
  - Mexican American college-bound adolescents ( $n = 182$ ) who used coping techniques of positive reinterpretation, focusing and venting emotions, social support, active coping,

religion, emotional support, and planning had more positive physical and psychological health (Vaughn & Roesch 2003)

## **Purpose of Study**

- ❑ To empirically examine the differences in and influences of educational context and differential coping responses (problem- and emotion-focused) on psychological well-being of Latino male college students
  - Investigate differences by class standing (i.e., lower and upper division) and generation (i.e., first vs. second) for each of the study's variables
  - Examine degree that the study's variables independently and collectively account for well-being
  - Assess differences in strengths of relationships by class standing and generation

## **Setting and Procedure**

- ❑ Institutional review board approved study
- ❑ Conducted at a large Southern Research I University
  - Latina/os comprised 11.5% of undergraduates
- ❑ Participants solicited via Chicano/Latino Studies classes, Latino-based organizations (clubs and fraternities), and academically-themed houses
- ❑ Survey completed during class or student organization meeting time
  - One student club returned surveys via student leader
- ❑ 15-20 minutes to complete counterbalanced survey
- ❑ No incentive provided
- ❑ Response rate of 62%

## **Student Participants**

**100 Latino male undergraduates**

### **Ethnicity**

- ❑ 69 Mexican American/Chicano
- ❑ 16 Central American
- ❑ 5 South American
- ❑ 2 Puerto Rican
- ❑ 1 Cuban
- ❑ 5 Multiracial (one parent of Latina/o descent)
- ❑ 2 missing

**Average Age** = 21.33 (SD = 2.71, range 18 to 35)

**Average GPA** = 2.87 (*SD* = .41, range 2.00 – 3.90)

- 62 began college at 4-year university
- 88 were continuously enrolled
- 88 expected to earn an advanced degree

### **Class standing**

- 13 Freshman
- 20 Sophomores
- 35 Juniors
- 31 Seniors
- 1 missing

### **Generation level**

- 13 first generation
- 72 second generation (i.e., born in the U.S.)
- 6 third generation
- 6 fourth and fifth generation students
- 3 missing

### **Finance of education**

- 63% took out students loans
- 55% worked part-time
- 50% received financial support from family

### **Familial income**

- 35 with familial income of \$29,000 or less

## **Instruments**

- Internal consistency coefficients ranged from .73 - .90.
- Demographic sheet** (19 items). Seven general, six educational, and seven family education history questions
- Collective Self Esteem (CSE)**, 16 items; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Measured membership ( $n = 4$ ), private collective ( $n = 4$ ), public collective ( $n = 4$ ), and importance to identity ( $n = 4$ ) self esteem
- Perception of Barriers Scale (POB)**, 14 items; McWhirter, 1997). Assessed perceptions of the likelihood that students would experience barriers that would cause them to withdraw ( $n = 9$ ) and barriers that would be experienced if one stayed in school ( $n = 5$ )
- University Environment Scale (UES)**, 14 item; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Measured perceptions of the university environment
- Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS)**, 13 items; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Assessed students' perceptions of congruity of personal and cultural values with the values held by the university

- ❑ **List of Coping Responses-Modified (LCR-M)**, 9 items; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Assessed the coping responses used by Mexican American college students
- ❑ **Student Coping (SCOPE)**, 30 items; Struthers, 1995). Examined students' problem-focused coping ( $n = 15$ ) and emotion-focused ( $n = 15$ ) coping responses
- ❑ **Psychological Well-Being Scale-Short Scale (PWBS-S)**, 18 items; Ryff, 1989). Measured six psychological domains of well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth

## Results

### **Individual Coping Response Frequencies**

- ❑ Most common coping responses:
  - actively find out more about the situation and take positive planned action
  - draw upon past experiences
- ❑ Least frequently-used responses were:
  - seek professional advise
  - pray and/or consult with a priest or minister

### **MANOVA**

- ❑ Significant main effects
  - class standing [ $\lambda = .74, p \leq .05, \eta^2 = .26$ ]
  - generation [ $\lambda = .77, p \leq .05, \eta^2 = .23$ ]
- ❑ Significant interaction
  - class standing by generation [ $\lambda = .74, p \leq .05, \eta^2 = .26$ ]

### **5-Step Hierarchical Regression**

- ❑ Significant omnibus regression equation [ $F(9, 81) = 11.20, p \leq .001$ ], accounting for 58.3% of the variance of WB (psychological well-being)
- ❑ **Step 1:** Generation and class standing
  - Nonsignificant  $r$ -squared change [ $.06, \Delta F(2, 79) = 2.67, p > .05$ ]
- ❑ **Step 2:** Cultural self-esteem (CSE)
  - $r$ -squared change of .09 [ $\Delta F(1, 78) = 8.01, p \leq .01$ ]
  - Moderate predictor ( $\beta = .30, t = 2.83, p \leq .01$ )
- ❑ **Step 3:** Perceived educational barriers cluster (PB-withdraw & PB-stay)
  - $r$ -squared change of .13 [ $\Delta F(2, 76) = 6.76, p \leq .001$ ]
  - PB-stay was a significant predictor ( $\beta = .39, t = 3.00, p < .001$ )
- ❑ **Step 4:** Cultural fit variable cluster (UES & CCS)
  - $r$ -squared change of .15 [ $\Delta F(2, 74) = 9.65, p \leq .001$ ]
  - UES and CCS, together, was a strong predictor ( $\beta = .50, t = .39, p \leq .001$ )
- ❑ **Step 5:** Coping response cluster (SCOPE-P & SCOPE-E)
  - $r$ -squared change was .16 [ $\Delta F(2, 72) = 13.42, p \leq .001$ ]
  - SCOPE-E was the only significant predictor in this cluster ( $\beta = .39, t = 4.60, p \leq .001$ )

### ***R to Z transformations***

- PB-stay and WB had significantly stronger ( $z = 2.86, p \leq .01$ ) relationship for first-generation ( $r = -.85$ ) than second-generation ( $r = -.37$ ) students

## **Discussion and Implications**

- Students with increased cultural congruity reported higher levels of psychological well-being
- Students with increased reports of well-being coped by
  - Actively finding out more about the situation
  - Taking positive planned action
  - Drawing upon their past experiences
  - Talking with others about the problem
- Strongest predictors of psychological well-being
  - Cultural congruity
  - Emotion-focused coping
  - Perception of barriers to staying in school
- Cultural congruity as the strongest predictor suggests that a priority for student service practitioners and university administrators should develop and conduct services to facilitate Latino male students' cultural fit in the university environment.
- Latino men appear to benefit from using emotion-focused coping responses. For this reason, Latino students should have an emotional outlet to cope with problems. This finding is perhaps of particular interest given that men are often socialized to be emotionally-unexpressive.
- Ultimately, the data appear to suggest that having culturally-relevant and gender appropriate emotional outlets for Latino male undergraduate students would facilitate psychological well-being and mitigate perceived barriers to staying in school.

## **Limitations ~ Future Research**

- Self-reported information ~ Identify means for external rating and assessment of individual coping
- Non-randomized sample ~ Work with administration to identify list of Latino students on campus
- Cross-sectional study ~ Use longitudinal study to examine coping methods across educational and developmental junctures
- Diversity of Latino ethnic groups represented in the study ~ Examine both between and within group issues to assess specific ethnic groups
- Measures limited possible responses to coping and perceived barriers ~ Use interviews to determine specific coping styles and perceived barriers

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