

# Latino Males in Texas Community Colleges: A Phenomenological Study of Masculinity Constructs and their Effect on College Experiences

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*Latino male college students are vanishing from postsecondary institutions. This phenomenological qualitative research study explores the educational attainment gap of Latino male community college students. Using male gender role conflict as the framework, this study determines three findings: (a) pride, or machismo, triggers men to admit emotionality only in rigid ways, (b) pride and fear prevent men from seeking academic support, and (c) cultural and familial expectations of getting a job and earning money as a marker of manhood all serve to “pull” Latino men away from their studies and make dropping out the easier and more viable option.*

*Keywords:* Latino males, community college, qualitative, male gender role conflict

Latino male college students are effectively vanishing from our postsecondary institutions (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011). Recent attention from leaders and policymakers (College Board, 2011) finally mirror years of concern from educational leaders about this persistent and growing gender gap in educational attainment. Since 2000, colleges and universities in Texas have focused on bridging gaps among identified racial and gender groups by reaching prescribed targets for higher education participation and success outlined in the State’s *Closing the Gaps* benchmarks. In a recent revision to these benchmarks (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2010), the State explicitly highlighted the importance

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of improving participation and success rates for Latino males, especially within the community college sector. In light of this renewed policy imperative, this qualitative study focused on Latino males community college experiences within the state of Texas.

College completion rates among Latinas/os is an issue that has attracted the attention of policymakers and researchers alike. Those with an interest in combating educational attainment gaps within the Latina/o student population are well aware of an even more nuanced discrepancy: a severe underrepresentation of Latino males in postsecondary education (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Sáenz, Oseguera, & Hurtado, 2007; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Estimates suggest Latina females are twice as likely to receive a postsecondary degree as their Latino male counterparts (Aud, Fox & Ramani, 2010).

A similar trend exists in the state of Texas: Latina females are earning baccalaureate degrees at higher rates than Latino males. In 2011, 51.5% of Latina<sup>1</sup> women completed a university baccalaureate degree in six years compared to 41.3% of Latino men (THECB, 2010). These statistics are alarming considering that Texas boasts the second largest Hispanic population, with 37.6% of Texans being of Hispanic descent and Hispanics accounting for 65% of the state's population growth since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). To address the gender-based educational disparities, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) created the Minority Male Initiative in 2009 to provide postsecondary services and programs for minority male academic success.

Despite the growing educational gap between male and female Latina/o students, only recently have researchers focused specifically on male community college students (e.g., Harris & Harper, 2008; Perrakis, 2008; Wood, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012; Wood & Palmer, 2013; Wood & Vasquez Urias, 2013; Vasquez Urias, 2012). As stated in one study, "disparities in enrollment, attainment, and engagement constitute most of what is known about men at community colleges...make[ing] the exploration of gendered questions necessary" (Harris & Harper, 2008, p. 26). When gendered and racialized trends are compounded with the state of Latino males in higher education, the course is clear: research attention on Latino male college students is needed.

To add to the scant literature on this educational challenge, this study examined the community college experiences of Latino males utilizing an explicitly gendered theoretical framework (Male Gender Role Conflict, O'Neil, 1981). The core research question guiding this study was: How do masculinity constructs influence the educational experiences of Latino males in Texas community colleges?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Latino Students and Community College**

Specific to the community college context, Hispanics of any gender are more likely than Whites to enroll in two-year colleges than four-year institutions after high school (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2002; College Board, 2011). Fry (2002) asserts several reasons to explain why Latina/o students enroll in two-year colleges at disproportionately higher rates. Considering Latina/o college students are more likely to represent lower socio-economic backgrounds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), Fry suggests that Latina/o students may be enrolled at two-year institutions at disproportionately higher rates because tuition is generally more affordable at two-year colleges than at four-year universities. Second, most two-year colleges design their courses for part-time students and offer evening courses to accommodate students who work during the

day. Third, two-year colleges typically offer various vocational courses and certification programs helping students obtain practical skill sets that allow them to join the workforce quickly and efficiently, a factor that Latina/o community college students may prioritize. Finally, an increasing number of community colleges have transfer agreements with four-year institutions; consequently, completing the basic requirements at a community college before transferring to a four-year institution presents a more affordable pathway towards the same goal.

Cultural factors are also salient to the large percentage of Latinas/os enrolling at community colleges (Fry, 2002). At the risk of essentializing cultural norms, the Latina/o culture may be considered collectivist in nature, with strong emphasis placed on familial bonds and relationships (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Given the accessible locale for most community colleges, Latina/o students can live at or near home with their families while attending college. Regarding language, community colleges are more likely to offer classes for non-native English speakers and recent immigrants, a factor that may appeal to Latina/o students who are English language learners (Fry, 2002).

Certainly, the economic and cultural characteristics of community colleges provide unique benefits that meet the demands of Latina/o students. Nevertheless, prior research has also shown that Latina/o undergraduates are more likely to drop out from two-year colleges than four-year universities (National Center on Education Statistics, 2000; THECB, 2012). Specifically, less than 50% of Latina/o students who initially enroll at a two-year college finish their postsecondary degree, while over 60% of Latina/o students who begin at a four-year university successfully receive a bachelor's degree (Kane & Rouse, 1999). These trends underscore a critical need to examine what community colleges can implement to increase retention and completion rates for Latina/o students, especially for males.

### **College Men as Men**

In recent years, researchers have begun to examine college men using explicitly gendered frameworks. Issues such as gender socialization, identity development, destructive behaviors, sexuality and sexual orientation, wellness, sports, and spirituality have gained momentum in the emerging literature (Davis, 2010; Harper, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris & Martin, 2006). The examination of community college male academic achievement has received increased attention recently (Harris & Harper, 2008; Perrakis, 2008; Vasquez Urias, 2012; Wood, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012; Wood & Palmer, 2013; Wood & Vasquez Urias, 2013). However, few studies examine Latino males in the community college context in an explicitly gendered manner.

**Gender and masculinity.** Research conducted on Latino males has suggested that Latino masculinity (sometimes referred to as *machismo*) is associated with negative and contradictory characteristics, such as assertiveness, power, control, aggression, and obsession with achieving status (De la Cancela, 1993; Rodriguez & Gonzales, 1997; Torres, Solberg, & Carlstrom, 2002). Recent scholars have argued that when these attributes are applied to White/European male celebrities/prominent figures, positive connotations including strength, virility, and sex appeal are associated (Mirande, 1997). As a result, Latino boys receive conflicting messages about what masculinity means; these messages can have negative implications on Latino boys navigating into adulthood, such as uncertainty of how to behave and perform masculinity in different social contexts. Furthermore, scholars have shown that the social construction of masculinity is often influenced by a person's power and socioeconomic

status because people in power have more authority, influence, and dominance (De La Cancela, 1986; Ramirez & Casper, 1999; Torres et al., 2002). Nevertheless, Latino men in the U.S. are often denied the economic and political clout to access such power. Young men, therefore, may feel the need to overextend their masculinity characteristics to compensate for their inability to access White, middle class patriarchy (Torres et al., 2002).

Levant and Kopecky (1996) also demonstrated the powerful effect of cultural masculine ideologies among Latino men. Though the degree to which Latino men espouse traditional and cultural notions of masculinity remains unclear, the conclusions from their study indicate that Latino men are culturally socialized toward dominance, self-reliance, status achievement, objectifying sexual attitudes, aversion of homosexuality, and avoidance of femininity. In addition, Levant and Kopecky's (1996) findings suggest that Latino men support cultural masculine gender roles even more than their African American or White peers. For example, Latino men expected to live their lives freely out in public, while Latina women were expected to be nurturing, submissive, and compliant at home (Levant & Kopecky, 1996).

In response to research focused on the negative characteristics of *machismo*, scholars such as Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey (2008) have made a concerted attempt to reframe *machismo* in a more positive light. The product of these collective efforts has been the conception of an alternative term called *caballerismo*, which is more inclusive of additional elements regarding Latino masculinity. As opposed to *machismo*, *caballerismo* highlights positive characteristics of masculinity, including nurturing, family-centeredness, and chivalry. In addition, under traditions of *machismo*, Latino men approach problems with less awareness, more impulsivity, and wishful thinking. Under the newer concept of *caballerismo*, the scholars address problems with more emotional connectedness, better psychological adjustment, and unique problem-solving abilities.

Furthermore, these gender and masculinity constructs can be magnified by the difficult nature of the college experience for Latino men (Cerna, Perez, & Sáenz, 2009; Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Cammarota (2004), for example, concluded that while Latinas felt that education was their escape from gender oppression within a patriarchal society, Latinos felt that schools were racially oppressive. Consequently, Latinas worked hard in an educational system that they believed offered them "freedom to learn," while Latinos were apathetic toward an oppressive or unaccommodating educational system.

Given the growing educational gender gap within the Latina/o population and the complex issue of male gender identity development, there is need to focus explicitly on men. The limited research on community college men underscores the need to consider men as gendered. This study responds to this gap in the literature by examining Latino males in community colleges with an explicitly gendered approach. The following section will outline this study's theoretical framework.

### **Theoretical Framework: Male Gender Role Conflict (MGRC)**

Since this study focuses on men and masculinity, male gender role conflict (MGRC, O'Neil, 1981) is an adequate framework to guide the analysis. Ideally, a framework that better melds with the phenomenological approach would exist. However, the dearth of theories pertaining to men of color in general, and Latino males in particular, limits the focus of this study (Harris & Harper, 2010). Despite its limitations, MGRC provides us with a means to examine participant experiences for gendered meanings and understand how appropriate MGRC

is for future work on young men of color. From this perspective, this study aims to probe MGRC's ability to describe and analyze the gendered experiences of Latino males in Texas community colleges.

Male gender role conflict (O'Neil, 1981) occurs when "rigid or restrictive gender roles learned during socialization prohibit a person from using one's human potential" (p. 204). MGRC holds that, for men, rigid gender role socialization leads to a deep seated learned fear of the feminine, which manifests in patterns of gender role conflict and strain, including restrictive emotionality; focus on control, power, and competition; homophobia; restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior; obsession with achievement and success; and health care problems. Negative effects of MGRC vary by individual, and variations emanate from differences in race, class, and early values systems, which implicate educational systems in gender socialization processes.

Though O'Neil's work was conducted in the 1980s, masculinity constructs were corroborated by later work. For example, Pollack's (1999) and Pollack and Shuster's (2001) "boy code" and Kimmel's (2008) "guyland" all align with MGRC, as does Brannon's (1976) earlier four fundamental rules of masculinity. These concepts articulate that boys are socially compelled to refuse emotion; act tough; dismiss the pain of others and themselves; reject femininity; measure self-worth on power, status, and wealth; and take risks through daring and aggressive behavior. While this study uses MGRC as a theoretical guide, the researchers' analysis takes into account cultural conceptions of masculinity as well – *machismo* and *caballerismo*. The first aligns well with the constructs of MGRC, while *caballerismo* recognizes positive contributions of Latino masculinity, including being nurturing, family-centered, and chivalrous. Although MGRC has been utilized in psychological research for decades, it has received limited attention in educational contexts (Harris & Harper, 2010).

The researchers, therefore, recognize the limitations of this particular framework in examining Latino males in community colleges. MGRC runs the risk of reifying masculinity constructs by naming masculinity but not always deconstructing masculinity. However, by utilizing a phenomenological approach, the researchers focused on the lived experiences of the participants (Patton, 2002) by employing MGRC as a launching point to consider how masculinities affect Latino male educational achievement. Given the absence of theory for understanding men's gendered and racialized experiences, the absence of gendered analysis of Latino men's experiences in community colleges, and the precedent of using MGRC to understand community college men (Harris & Harper, 2008), this study is a departure from previous work and fills an important gap in the literature.

## Methods

This qualitative study focused on the experiences of Latino male students in Texas community colleges. The purpose of the study was to explore how masculinity constructs influence Latino males' educational experiences. To examine these complex processes, a qualitative approach offered the ability to gain rich descriptions of Latino male perceptions as well as explore the meanings and interpretations given to specific decisions, events, and ideas (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative methods assisted us in building connections within the data by uncovering how Latino males make sense of their educational experiences and illuminating how these constructions affect the attitudes and decisions that these students make.

Attention to contextual and circumstantial details allowed special consideration to particular aspects of the Latino male educational experience that quantitative approaches might typically overlook (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). This study utilized a phenomenological approach, for it is situated within a paradigm of personal perspective and subjectivity and is focused on interpretation (Grbich, 2007). More specifically, the phenomenological approach was chosen as a means to illuminate the phenomena of the Latino male educational experience and understand how these students personally perceive their situation (Willis, 2007). Because phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of social and psychological phenomena shared by participants, this approach suits the subject and purpose of this study (Moustakas, 1994; Welman & Kruger, 1999).

The investigators spoke with 130 Latino male students in 23 focus groups at seven community colleges across the state of Texas over the course of two years. Each 60-minute focus group involved four to eight participants and was digitally recorded and transcribed for later analysis. All focus group participants met two conditions. First, all participants self-identified as a Hispanic, Hispano, or Latino male. Secondly, all participants were enrolled full- or part-time at one of the community college research sites. To recruit participants, the principal investigator established relationships with each research site's gatekeeper: a designated individual that assisted the research team with gaining access to individuals on each campus. The principal researcher utilized this relationship to organize each research site visit and establish connections with possible research participants.

Each focus group was led by a research team member who utilized a protocol to center the conversation on three main areas of interest: pre-college experiences, collegiate experiences, and future goals. Focus group participants were encouraged to share additional information pertinent to their collegial experiences. The researchers employed a focus group approach in an effort to explore the Latino male educational gap in greater depth. This approach allowed access to various in-depth perspectives (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2008; Glesne, 2011; Gray-Vickrey, 1993).

Prior to participation, students were required to complete necessary institutional review board consent forms, as well as information forms that collected relevant demographic data. Such data illustrated a varied array of participant backgrounds, including characteristics pertaining to age, employment status, and family educational background.

Once all focus group recordings were transcribed, the research team was charged with coding all transcripts. The first step in this process was to identify initial "start" codes using a small sample of transcripts that were used to establish an overall analysis codebook (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These sample transcripts were coded openly without the use of a codebook to identify concepts that could be further investigated and dimensionalised (Grich, 2007). Once all team members individually reviewed their transcripts and saturated possible codes, the team discussed and reviewed relevant codes. From that meeting, the research team established the final analysis codebook.

Once the analysis codebook was established, research team members double-coded all transcripts using the codebook. Each transcript was read several times and electronically coded by two separate team members for specific categories and themes (e.g., institutional awareness, institutional strategies, machismo or masculinity). These coding categories were guided by the initial codebook and determined by significant ideas and illuminative quotations that appeared within the data collected. Each coder was encouraged to utilize the analysis codebook to identify etic constructs and control the focus of the study. However, emic constructs, including

additional emerging codes and sub-codes, were incorporated throughout the analysis process as a way of further expanding the analysis and probing the data (Lett, 2005).

To accommodate the large amount of data collected, the researchers utilized ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software to aid in organizing and analyzing the data. This software helped the researchers categorize data by codes and facilitate identification of emerging themes, which were integral to the analytical process. Codes were reviewed across all of the study's focus groups and emerging themes were identified. To aid in the data analysis process, the research team also engaged in on-going conversations and memo writing activities (Grbich, 2007; Clarke, 2005), which assisted in understanding the Latino male student experiences in greater depth and defining emerging themes within the data. During this stage, significant patterns within the data were noted and discussed among research team members for greater understanding.

### **Researcher Positionalities**

This study was a team effort. The principal investigator (PI) is a Latino male, and his research team is comprised of two Latino males, four Latina females, one Asian American male, and three White females. One advantage of the research team was its diversity, with a mixture of gender insiders and outsiders and cultural insiders and outsiders. Additionally, all members shared a commitment to producing more equitable educational environments. Though all researchers initiated their analyses from slightly different perspectives, the group worked together to interview participants, create the codebook, build reliability, determine interpretative meanings, and conduct analyses.

Not all team members were involved in every step of the research – some were involved in interviews but not coding, or coding but not interviews. It is also important to mention that a core of researchers helped provide continuity to the process and ensure that any discontinuities in interpretation were interrogated and questioned. Furthermore, all researchers wrote analytical memos after their research and/or analysis activities that were used to help triangulate interpretations and provide a space for researchers to explore their own positionality as they conducted their work (Clarke, 2005). In short, the group's composition and dedication to this endeavor allowed us to delve deeply into the data, consider multiple possible interpretations, and produce trustworthy analyses.

### **Selected Findings**

The researchers' findings relate to three MGRC patterns: restrictive emotionality; focus on control, power, and competition; and obsession with achievement and success. The first two constructs, restrictive emotionality and control, power, and competition were culturally bound in notions of *machismo*, which were paradoxically interwoven with feelings of pride and fear. Therefore, the researchers discuss the first two masculinity constructs together and the third separately.

#### ***Machismo*: Restrictive Emotionality and Focus on Control, Power, and Competition**

Traditional masculinity concepts (O'Neil, 1981) emphasize strength and silence when challenges arise and the avoidance of 'soft,' feminized, or weak emotions. The researchers' analysis found the presence of the concepts of restrictive emotionality and focus on control,

power, and competition. Restrictive emotionality holds that men have difficulty expressing emotions since feelings are a sign of femininity and reveal vulnerability. The concept of focus on control, power, and competition highlights men's need to control situations as well as gain and maintain power over others, often through competition. The Latino males in this study reflected such characteristics and behavior, which was often displayed by their avoidance in asking for help, even in the face of impending failure. Participants often labeled their reluctance to admit feelings of inadequacy as *pride* and/or *machismo*. They relied on this monolithic feeling to express themselves, even when the fear and anxiety was related to academic underperformance.

**“Machismo” as both positive and negative.** *Machismo* did not fit neatly into MGRC constructs, perhaps due to its inclusion of cultural norms. Findings from this study, for instance, illustrated a paradox in the notion of *machismo*. First, the researchers noted that men's pride, or *machismo*, was a source of strength, propelling them to work harder for their goals. In fact, for some men in this study, the very thought of Latina female success surpassing Latino male success triggered a competitive nature and prompted them to try harder in school; a quasi-positive response from feelings of pride/*machismo*. This “quasi-positive” response refers to the positive effect that *machismo* has on helping some men continue to aspire and work towards educational achievement. Yet, it also takes into account the negative form of hegemonic patriarchy that fabricates competition with Latinas.

In contrast to the positive outcomes of pride/*machismo*, the researchers also identified negative consequences of which men were cognizant. Men directly articulated that *machismo* was a barrier to their academic success as it often prevented Latino males from standing up for themselves and seeking help when it was most needed. This theme was prominent throughout the analysis, particularly in the following statements:

Facilitator: Do you think Latinos in general feel comfortable asking other Latinos for help, or is that ...

St #1: I don't think so. I think there's some sort of pride in our culture that keeps us from asking for help in general.

St #2: Yeah, I think it's basically that some of us are on our own and we're by ourselves already so there's not really – we're already here doing this by ourselves, why do we need else to ...

St #3: I heard a word that relates to that and they call it *machismo*.

St #4: Yeah, exactly.

Group: [Laughs]

St #3: Yeah, trying to go out there and do it by yourself and not asking for help; that's one of the terms that I hear.

St #1: That's true.

St #5: And like what you were saying the *machismo*, when I would hear stories about my dad, he would tell me about how he raised us and that he didn't need help from



anybody. So when I'm in school I'm thinking I have to do everything by myself because I have something to prove, and asking for help I guess kind of weakens the cause of what I'm doing. So there is some sense of *machismo* in that.

The conversation here begins and ends in restriction. These men stated that their internalized cultural pride, or *machismo*, influences their behaviors, specifically, help-seeking behaviors. The participants mentioned that since they were already “doing this” (going to college) alone, it made sense to continue alone. Furthermore, Student #5 articulates a further family narrative impacting his *machismo*—his desire to live his life as his father did—alone and without help. Statements such as these demonstrate the thought processes associated from years of acculturation to certain behaviors for Latino males. In addition, this discussion highlights the way *machismo* interacts with notions of power and control. These young men perceive themselves (and in the case of Student #5, his father as well) as in control via *machismo*, controlling their destinies by not allowing others to help them, often to their detriment.

As reviewed in the literature, *machismo*, or male pride, is often associated with negative connotations when used to describe Latino men. As a result, many young Latino men fall into a self-fulfilling prophecy as they internalize societal expectations in negative ways. This is especially true in regards to their educational goals, which was evidenced when the participants were asked why they did not seek help and/or why they did not admit lack of comprehension of material. Rather than answering the question directly, many young men placed blame on *machismo* and responded they were just “too proud,” “too stubborn,” or “too dismissive” to access resources. In several interviews, young men connected those behaviors back to pride directly:

It also comes from a sense of pride. You know, you're always taught to be a man, and you're proud and, if you fall, if you stumble, then that's your own fault. You don't bring anybody down with you. You don't ask for help because it's your doing. You shouldn't have to ask anybody for help, and so it's just that sense of pride that carries over – that in the end, makes you fail...because with that, if you're failing, you don't come back up because you don't want anybody to help, and sometimes you can't come back up without help. So it's that sense of pride that just holds...that brings you down.

This young man articulates how pride and a reluctance to seek help can ultimately doom Latino males to college failure. Because these young men internalize their obstacles, rather than seek resources or a support system, they are at times overwhelmed and unable to handle the obstacles they face.

**Fear of failure.** In relation to this looming specter of failure, the men presented associated feelings of fear. For example, the participants indicated that, despite their overt pride and confidence, they were often afraid of failing. This fear revealed itself as anxiety; when faced with challenges, men were more likely to quit, opting to take pride in meeting familial obligations than pride in persisting in school. These decisions demonstrate a fight or flight response; by choosing to drop out, males could run away from the source of their fear of failure – education—but simultaneously run towards a source of confidence and strength—a job. The following excerpt displays how this fear turns many Latino males away from not truly committing to an educational pathway, and even seek reasons to drop out:

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St #1: I think a big portion of students, who are enrolled here, especially male Hispanics, they're not that serious about school. They enroll in a few classes, and they're in school and that's it. They're not really taking it seriously as they should be.

St #2: Or they'll fail a class and then they'll just be like, 'Uh, I'm not doing it; I'm not going to try it again, I'll just drop it.'

St #3: Or they think that they're not smart enough to be here.

St #4: Yeah, they do badly in one class and then all of a sudden college is impossible because of that one class.

St #5: Because they don't want to get help because of *machismo*.

Group: [Laughs]

St #6: And unfortunately it's just when you don't know the ropes and there's nobody there to teach you. Most of us are first-year, [first-] generation college students and we don't know what to do. And I think a lot of that has a lot to do with it, so when they finally hit that breaking point, they just quit.

St #7: Yeah. They're probably just looking [for] the first thing that gets in their way to step out, whether it's their family and they're like, 'Oh I have to get out of school then because I have to do this for my family,' or, 'Hey I'm not really getting the support that I need here on campus,' or, 'I'm not doing so hot in this class.' Then that's the first thing that comes to their mind and they're going to drop. They don't have their long-term plan set up for them and that's basically what it is. They're looking for the first excuse to get out of college.

This conversation highlights the perception that help is not readily available, thus leading men to potentially drop out of school. Rather than seeking help, their sense of pride and/or fear leads to further excuses about not wanting to continue their education. In essence, they begin college with an escape plan, which includes not accepting help so they can maintain a clear focus on the knowable future (working and supporting a family), rather than working towards the intimidating and unknown future (education and social mobility). The last comment made by Student #7, speaks simultaneously to notions of *machismo* and *caballerismo*. *Machismo* prevents students from asking for help, while *caballerismo* provides a convenient and valid excuse for dropping out—commitment to family and pride in fulfilling familial obligations. Thus, it is not just pride pulling men away from their academic obligations, but rather fear *and* pride.

Participants suggest fear and pride impedes their academic success. When men internalize traditional masculinity ideals, it ignites their hidden fears and inhibits their help-seeking behaviors. Men who access help-seeking behaviors, then, transform the struggle to succeed from being not only about pride, but also about overcoming fear.

**Pressure to achieve status.** Pressure to achieve status refers to men's preoccupation with work, status, wealth, and power to achieve personal value (O'Neil, 1981). Latino men in this study associated social status with the accumulation of money. They reported being tempted by opportunities to make quick and easy money, especially for those with a family to support. Participants also identified employment as a cultural marker of manhood. As such, the men

expressed pressure from their community, peers, and others to enter the workforce after high school rather than continuing their education. Thus, the sooner they obtained employment and financial gain, the sooner they achieved manhood. Education, then, became too time-consuming whereas employment immediately proved status and self-worth. Conceptions of education, pride, and money became entangled in men's notions of manhood:

Yeah, with mine it is because like my mom, right after I got out of high school, she was like, "When are you going to get a job?" And [I said], "Well I kind of want to go to college first and try it out; if it's not for me then I'll get a job." But she constantly keeps reminding me, "When are you going to get a job? You have to help us with the income, and stuff." And then my mind's like, I'm taking all of these classes and I have a full course load and everything so I can't do it. It's not like easy classes, they're pretty difficult classes so...I mean I've gotten to understand it, but she always used to always remind me, "When are you getting a job? When are you going to help out?"

While this particular student was able to find a balance between the pressure of obtaining a job and maintaining his commitment to education, many Latino males are not successful in meeting this challenge. When this familial pressure to work and contribute to the family's income is coupled with feelings of fear and anxiety of failure, Latino males are often faced with making understandable yet shortsighted decisions. This quote also expresses an important influence on men's gendered lives, which is the influence of family and high expectations to contribute to family life. This was a recurring theme that relates to *caballerismo*.

This study's findings indicated that Latino males found it difficult to forego markers of masculinity such as gainful employment. Many male students felt there was a noticeable disconnect between education and economic success. Sometimes, students felt that education and economic success were juxtaposed instead of interrelated. For example, by choosing to quit school and earn money, they were also choosing to establish a sense of masculinity. On the other hand, if they chose to continue their education, this meant foregoing an income and its incumbent masculine cache. It is important to note that the researchers' analysis found that men did not consistently conceive of education as a pathway towards long-term success. Even in the quote above, the young man did not reference future economic gain, though certainly it was an unspoken value attached to education.

### Discussion

The findings yield two branches of discussion, one related to theory, the other to practice. Regarding theory, MGRC explicitly focuses on the negative impact of masculine norms and hegemony; however, the findings revealed quasi-positive manifestations of masculinity, including competition and pride as driving forces in Latino men's lives. The researchers call them quasi-positive since men in this study juxtaposed their success via competition and pride to their peers—for students who can be the "winners" in this game, this conception can be generally positive, while for the "losers," this false competition is yet another force pulling them away from education. Furthermore, some participants had a budding awareness of how masculinity, *machismo* in particular, was a restricting force in their lives. Building upon Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey's (2008) attempt to reframe *machismo* more positively through *caballerismo*, further research is needed to understand how men, especially Latino males, conceptualize and develop their sense of masculinity.

In addition, since Latino students are more likely than Whites to enroll in two-year colleges than four-year institutions (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2002; College Board, 2011), further research should be centered upon the unique characteristics and experiences of these students in two-year settings. Identity models should be revisited and updated to help practitioners better facilitate conversations with Latino males about their masculinity development through the lens of cultural and college experiences.

Regarding social and cultural constructs of masculinity, the findings indicate that male gender role conflict and normative constructions of masculinity are living, breathing forces in Latino males' lives. The findings corroborate literature about the socialization of young men. For example, they tend to avoid seeking help and are less likely to utilize support networks (Cammarota, 2004; Gloria, et al., 2009). In addition, there are constructs specific to the Latino community, including the unique presence of *machismo* as a cultural construct and the socializing forces of peers and families. In conjunction with *machismo*, this study's findings also revealed the presence of *caballerismo*. However, unlike the literature (Arciniega et al., 2008), which frames *caballerismo* as positive manifestations of masculinity, the researchers found that *caballerismo* also pulls men away from their studies. Such findings do not imply that being nurturing, family-centered, and chivalrous are negative characteristics; rather *caballerismo* in the educational context may impede Latino males' persistence.

### **Implications for Practice**

The researchers' findings suggest community colleges can do more to facilitate men's growing awareness of rigid gender roles, particularly for Latino males. Such efforts may include supporting and/or challenging notions of masculinity and transforming perceptions of education to a freeing rather than restricting force (Cammarota, 2004). Thus, the researchers offer three specific recommendations for practice.

**Re-framing programs and services with men in mind.** The ability of a Latino male college student to successfully navigate the complex college environment is critical to their success (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Designing or re-designing programs with "men in mind" represents a positive mechanism to assist Latino males in being successful, not only in college, but beyond. Programs with "men in mind" focus explicitly on the learning and developmental needs of male students, and they can also focus on specific male sub-groups, such as Latino males. Programming with "men in mind" can provide meaningful opportunities for Latino males to socialize with other Latino peers and develop purposeful relationships with male faculty and staff. Such efforts are especially important considering that male students tend not to seek assistance, tend to believe that they can figure things out on their own, and can be inadvertently stigmatized by "special" programs (Gloria et al., 2009). Therefore, administrators may take several approaches to addressing this issue.

First, administrators may choose to establish explicit programs and services that are designed with "men in mind," meaning men's help-averse tendencies. In addition to establishing specialized programs, institutions might also consider re-framing the way in which such programs are marketed. This is particularly important so as to ensure that Latino males, and other male students, do not feel as if their masculinity has been compromised or that they are being ostracized for their inability to perform well academically. Re-framing male programming and services from a "helping" or "assistance" (deficit) model to one that emphasizes intrusive programming and services for all, may encourage Latino males to take advantage of resources

that enhance the way they experience campus life (Harper, 2010). For example, Harper (2010, 2012) demonstrated the importance of positive reframing and utilizing additive rhetoric in African American male students. Anti-deficit achievement models will put forth a more positive perspective of Latino male educational success by combining precollege socialization and readiness (i.e., familial factors, K-12 school forces, and out-of-school experiences) with college achievement both inside and outside of the classroom (i.e., classroom interactions, out-of-class engagement and experiential/external opportunities) and, finally, persistence. Orientation and outreach programs that engage family members, for example, could be a viable design, as this can reinforce the positive role of family in the lives of Latino males.

Offering specific Latino male programs, particularly during the critical first semester, can provide institutions with appropriate “safe spaces” for Latino males to discuss the importance of being successful in college, as well as provide them with the necessary support services to address specific needs. Another important consideration in providing programming for Latino males is the ability to facilitate positive and relatable messages that can impact their success. It is critical that institutions make an effort to directly connect with their Latino male student population. Latino male students tend not to return for additional support services or to the institution. Thus, community college administrators, faculty, and staff must be prepared to successfully engage and be responsive to Latino male students. This can be done through awareness campaigns, ongoing conversations across the campus, and through the collaboration of both student and academic affairs units charged with positively influencing the educational outcomes for Latino males. When Latino males reach out for help, community colleges need to be immediately responsive or risk losing the opportunity to connect. Furthermore, staff, faculty, and administrators must make themselves available to young Latino men *early* and *often*, in particular early in the semester. Since men are less likely to ask for help, advisors should be thoughtful and respectful in their assumptions that silence may mean a lack of knowledge. At best, students will become more engaged with their coursework and gain vital information they need to succeed.

**Integrated career and academic pathways.** The findings suggest that Latino males experience conflict in negotiating the requirements of academic life and the internal desire, as well as the external pressure, to become employed and provide familial support. To address this conflict, greater integration of career and academic pathways could help demonstrate to Latino males, as well as their families, a closer relation between the academic pathway and the career pathway. Such connections can be made via service learning, cooperative education, and internships, which may enable students to combine traditional, classroom-based learning with on-site work experience.

In addition, step-by-step academic advising and career planning can guide students through the process of understanding which courses to take each semester and align those courses to their career goals. Given the disconnect between education and future economic gain articulated by the participants, strategic academic advising and career planning is important to the success and retention of Latino male college students. By providing strategic academic advising and career planning, advisors can work individually with Latino male students to understand their academic strengths and weaknesses. This process can allow advisors to engage these men in critical thinking about their futures, be less prescriptive when developing individualized course schedules with Latino males, and help Latino male students relate academic goals to career goals.

Yet, academic advising needs to be more than advisors telling Latino male students what courses to take next. Instead, a well-integrated academic plan may also lead to concrete career planning. Although academic advising and career counseling may be considered separate services (and offices) due to institutional structure, Latino male students need to perceive the two as a seamless process towards student success.

**Messaging to Latino males and their families.** Traditional Latina/o culture generally consists of a collectivist nature and places strong emphasis on familial bonds and relationships (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). With this in mind, institutions should consider engaging the families of Latino males in their educational pursuits. Such collective support can be crucial to ensuring that students succeed academically, especially given the unique aspects of the community college setting and issues surrounding masculinity, work, and family. It is important that Latino males and their families are also aware of the realities of pursuing a higher education (i.e., college is not easy, it requires time and energy, and it is challenging). Institutional agents must provide an open platform to help Latino males and their families recognize the familial sacrifices that will be made to earn a college degree. Such honesty should include the fact that the benefits of college are not immediate, but that college completion will offer a path to better financial opportunities in the long run.

Latino male community college students, and their family members, must recognize that the path towards a college degree will present challenges. However, despite their financial and personal responsibilities, Latino males must also know that earning a college degree is still within their grasp. Thus, their community college experience will be an exercise in learning how to balance college coursework with outside obligations. This form of messaging may help Latino males strengthen their time management skills, knowing that working and being a student is possible *and* worth the effort.

Practitioners also need to have explicit discussions of how to cope with failure. Since Latino males are disinclined to ask for help or admit imminent failure, previously mentioned strategies such as creating safe spaces for discussion and strategic advising must equip Latino males with the skills and the confidence to respond to failure constructively. Ultimately, practitioners should recognize the complexity of internal masculinity conflicts that can exist within the varied experiences of Latino males in community colleges, conflicts that can serve to either marginalize them further from their educational goals or serve as a source of motivation to fulfill those goals.

### **Conclusion**

Latino male college students may be vanishing from our postsecondary institutions (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011), but this study demonstrated the salience of both ethnicity and gender identity in understanding the experiences of these men as they navigate their community college experiences. The researchers examined a diverse group of Latino males and examined focus group data to understand how masculinity constructs influenced Latino males' community college experiences. Findings suggest that pride, or *machismo*, a) caused men to admit emotionality only in rigid ways, b) pride and fear prevented men from seeking help when needed, and c) cultural and familial expectations of getting a job and earning money was as marker of manhood. All three findings are factors that pull men away from their studies and make dropping out the easier and more viable option, allowing men to embrace socially constructed forms of masculinity. The findings suggest further research needs to be conducted regarding men's constructions of masculinity, particularly as it intersects with culture. In

addition, the researchers offered three implementation ideas to aid in better serving this population.

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this paper we employ the term Latina/os but refer to Hispanics when referencing reports or studies based on federal data that use this category. Latina/os describes students that are of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or other Latina/o descent.

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