



Latino Men and Masculinities: Community College Transfer Experiences in Texas, California, and Florida

By

Sarah L. Rodriguez, Ph.D., Marissa Vasquez, Ed.D, Cristobal Salinas Jr., Ph.D.



Sarah L. Rodriguez, Ph.D.

Marissa Vasquez, Ed.D

Cristobal Salinas Jr., Ph.D.

Today, transfer to a four-year university is a goal for many community college students. However, transferring can be a complex process for students to navigate as they negotiate not only the policies and procedures across institutions but also their own intersecting identities across these spaces. Focusing on Latino men, recent data indicate that only 15.4% will earn a certificate, degree, or transfer from a community college to a four-year institution within three years (Wood, Harris, & Xiong, 2014). Additionally, of Latino men over 25, 6% earned an associates degree, 10% earned a bachelor degree, and 4% had an advanced degree as their highest level of educational attainment (Excelencia in Education, 2015). For Latino men, in particular, their multiple identities and enacting them across multiple environments, including family, community college and four-year university spaces, can lead to conflicts (Harris III & Harper, 2008; Sáenz, Bukoski, Lu, Rodriguez, 2013; Sáenz, Mayo, Miller, & Rodriguez, 2015; Vasquez Urias & Wood, 2015). Despite the growing population of Latino men served by community colleges, there is little research concerning them in community colleges and even less on their experiences as transfer students. Additionally, very little is known about the socialization of transfer students and how their concepts of masculinity and identity play out in these contexts.

To expand the understanding of Latino college men as complex individuals possessing multiple, intersecting identities, Dr. Sarah Rodriguez, Dr. Marissa Vasquez, and Dr. Cristobal Salinas' research focuses on how masculinity influences the community college to four-year university transfer experience. The phenomenological study referenced in this brief focused on examining the lived socialization and masculinities experiences of 36 undergraduate Latino men who had transferred from a community college to a four-year university in Texas, California, or Florida. Participants were over the age of 18, self-identified as Latino or Hispanic, self-identified as men, had transferred from a community college to a four-year institution, and were currently enrolled as undergraduate students at a four-year public institution. This study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What prior gender socialization experiences do men bring with them as they transition from the community college to the four-year college experience? 2) How do masculinities and identity conflicts affect male students' attitudes and behaviors during this transition? The following is a summary of the key findings from this study.

Findings

Prior Gender Socialization

The participants in this study frequently discussed leadership, honesty, being strong and being a provider as particularly characteristic of Latino men. From their prior gender socialization experiences, participants held normative ideas about what physical, personal, and behavioral traits make a Latino man. These included physical attributes such as facial hair, stature, voice and particular mannerisms, as well as personal and behavioral attributes such as being independent, in control, and providers. Participants had procured these normative ideas through interaction with family, friends, culture, and the media. These normative views influenced how participants approached issues of understanding self, major selection, help-seeking, and peer interactions during their transfer experience from a community college to a four-year institution. The men in the study valued the concepts of being independent, proving oneself and forging one's own way through life. This emphasis was exemplified in the expectation that Latino men would avoid help-seeking behaviors in their academic and personal lives, a practice learned from their fathers.

Participants also discussed the need for independence and control in setting one's own course as a core value of being a man. Prior gender socialization characterized men as needing to be in control of one's situation. This included being in control of one's feelings, finances, and emotions. Independence and control as a Latino man also meant providing for one's family and being financially successful. Men were seen as needing to navigate finances for their family and themselves. This was characterized as being a pillar of support and strength and "being there" in times of need. Without such control, Latino men felt paralyzed. This was particularly problematic during the transfer process when many aspects related to feelings, finances, and emotions seemed outside the control of the individual.

Conflict in Transfer

These concepts of what it means to be a man built up by prior gender socialization led to conflicts during transfer from community colleges to four-year universities for the study's participants. In terms of masculinity, the participants questioned their identities as men if they did not have, or potentially did not want, these previously socialized masculine traits as they moved through college. They struggled with what would happen if they could not provide or if they were not considered a "man's man." Queer Latino men, in particular, were forced to negotiate these concepts. For some, the coming out process during college was a particular point of contention as it challenged the traditional concepts of masculinity they had been socialized into during their youth. Other intersecting identities, such as age, origins, and citizenship status created complex identities and ways of experiencing the transfer process.

Socialized norms influenced students as they went through the transfer process. The desire to be independent and a provider had both positive and negative repercussions. On the one hand, it made students self-reliant with a focus on personal growth, giving back and redefining what being a "provider" might mean. On the other hand, this focus also led to a reluctance to seek out help and resources, admit failures and even recover as students struggled with the pressure to prove themselves. A significant source of strength and aid for the participants during transfer came from on-campus men's groups. Participating in these groups helped them to redefine masculinity and behaviors related to being a man. These groups provided space for inspiring trust between the participants and peers and created mentoring relationships that developed trust, honesty, and care.

Conclusion

This study found that Latino men brought prior gender and racial/ethnic socialization patterns with them during the transfer process. These socialization patterns influenced the ways in which Latino men engaged with the college-going process and shaped their perspectives about masculinities. In order to understand men as complex individuals, future research will need to consider intersectionality to uncover the multiple identities of men who are transfer students. Student organizations for men of color could also be studied to explore how they impact Latino men throughout the transfer process and during their experience in college. Understanding how programming in these areas at community colleges affects students after transfer could shed new light on how interventions enable students to succeed and how their identities develop. The findings of this study can also inform practice and policy in higher education. The findings suggest benefits from and a need for spaces on college campuses for discussing issues related to masculinity. Creating such spaces and support structures at the community college level may help to better prepare men for their transfer experiences and take advantage of such structures more readily when they move to four-year colleges. Policy makers should also look at men as complex individuals and consider their multiple intersecting identities. This view of men should be considered at both the initial conception of policies and throughout evaluation and refinement as well.

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About the authors

Sarah L. Rodriguez, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in Community College Leadership/Higher Education, at Iowa State University. Contact Dr. Rodriguez by email at: srod@iastate.edu

Marissa Vasquez, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Administration, Rehabilitation, and Postsecondary Education (ARPE) at San Diego State University (SDSU). Contact Dr. Vasquez by email at: mvasquez@mail.sdsu.edu

Cristobal Salinas Jr., Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Educational Leadership and Research Methodology Department, in the College of Education, at Florida Atlantic University. Contact Dr. Salinas by email at: salinasc@fau.edu

