



## Understanding Family Relationships for Queer Latino Men at Selective Higher Education Institutions

Antonio Duran, M.S. and David Perez II, Ph.D.



Antonio Duran, M.S. and David Perez II, Ph.D.

Although research on Latino men in higher education has increased over the past decade (Carrillo, 2013; Garcia, Huerta, Ramirez, & Patrón, 2017; Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009; Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Sáenz, Ponjuán, & Figueroa, 2016), few scholars have examined the experiences of subgroups within this student population. Notably, only a small number of empirical studies have focused on the experiences of Latino college men who also identify as part of the queer community (Duran & Pérez, 2017; Eaton & Rios, 2017; Rios & Eaton, 2016). This research gap is alarming, considering that literature indicates queer Latino men frequently face marginalization from Latinx communities based on perceptions that they are more feminine (Hirai, Winkel, & Popan, 2014). Related to this point, one common theme that arises in this extant scholarship is the contentious nature of Latino men's relationship with their immediate and extended family.

Though Sáenz and Ponjuán (2009) argued that *familismo* [*familism*] can be pivotal to the success of Latino men, these relationships are different for individuals who identify as sexual minorities (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009). With this in mind, Duran and Pérez (2017) critically examined how queer Latino college men navigate their familial relationships—both biological and chosen (Weston, 1991)—while enrolled in selective higher education institutions where they might contend with greater marginalization around their social identities.

Using Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, this research sought to elucidate queer Latino men's engagement with familial capital from an asset-based perspective. In particular, we analyzed the stories of 15 Latino men who identified as part of the queer community utilizing qualitative data from *TNSLMA*. The two research questions that guided our study were as follows: (1) How do queer Latino men approach the topic of their sexuality with their biological family members while enrolled in higher education? (2) How do queer Latino men experience different forms of familial capital during their time in college that contributes to their success?

### Relationships with Biological Family Members

This study examined how queer Latino men described their relationships with their biological family members, paying special attention to how they negotiated issues around their sexuality while enrolled in college. Queer Latino men described being open with non-family members about their queer identities on campus; however, they chose to keep their sexuality a secret from family for fear of not being accepted due to heteronormativity present in Latinx culture. Arturo stated, "Growing up, being anything but straight was something that was foreign. You couldn't talk about it and you couldn't be it." Moreover, participants did not want to exert energy correcting their families' assumptions or stereotypes about queer individuals while they were away at college. These concerns were exacerbated for the Latino men in this study who were financially dependent on their families.

Conversely, Latino men who were out to their biological family members had to negotiate microaggressions and moments in which their sexuality was erased. For example, Angel shared how his father reinforced other qualities in an attempt to divert attention from his queer sexuality, saying things such as: “You’re very tough. You’re handsome . . . and you’re very manly.” James asserted, “There is a big issue with Latino males and masculinity, having seen it with my family.” Though family members were accepting of their sexuality, they still perpetuated harmful messages about being queer. Thus, Latino men had to contend with exploring their sexuality on- and off-campus while hearing these marginalizing comments from their family.

### Chosen Family Members’ Influence on Queer Latino Men’s Success

Consistent with Weston’s (1991) seminal research, queer Latino men in this study expanded upon their familial capital by developing chosen family relationships with individuals on their campus. For example, James talked about becoming a “queer role model” for his peers on campus. For these students, chosen family members provided them with the aspirational, resistant, and navigational capital they needed to be succeed at highly selective institutions.

In fact, participants frequently utilized familial terms to convey their relationships with staff, faculty, and peers at their institutions. Whereas Adan described an administrator in the Latino Cultural Center as his “abuelito [grandfather],” Fabian referred to the director of a campus cultural center as a “motherly figure on campus.” Importantly, participants established these chosen family relationships with university faculty and staff who embraced their racial/ethnic and sexual identity, even if they did not identify as a queer person of color (QPOC).

Similarly, other queer Latino men in the study referenced peers that accepted their queerness and inspired them to remain resilient. Alfonso’s fraternity brothers strove to reject practices that perpetuated overt masculinity, offering him a space where he felt supported. He emphasized, “I feel like I know all my fraternity brothers better than my blood brothers.” Participants depicted similar experiences with individuals in QPOC student organizations, other fraternities, or Latinx-based clubs. These chosen family relationships with peers allowed participants to make sense of their intersecting identities while they experienced racist and homophobic treatment. Consequently, these queer Latino men were better equipped to resist these hostile campus climates and to help change them for future generations of students.

### Implications for Research and Practice

Findings from this study offer nuanced understandings of queer Latino undergraduate men as they navigate selective institutions. First, these results serve as a catalyst for scholars to challenge essentialist understandings of Latino men by initiating studies that critically examine how intersecting social identities (e.g., sexuality, disability, etc.) influence their collegiate experience. For example, research that shed light on the experiences of queer Latina women (Revilla, 2010; Vega, 2016) and transgender Latinx individuals are much needed. Second, the narratives shared by the participants challenge higher education practitioners to consider the various types of familial relationships that queer Latino undergraduate men develop in college. These familial bonds with peers transcended traditional conceptualizations of friendship; instead, these chosen family relationships provided them with a sense of familismo that fosters the educational success of Latino college students (Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). Collectively, the findings presented in this study underscore the important role faculty, staff, and peers can play in queer Latino men navigating campus, achieving their goals, and resisting oppressive environments at selective higher education institutions.

#### References

- Carrillo, J. F. (2013). The unhomely in academic success: Latino males navigating the ghetto nerd borderlands. *Culture, Society & Masculinities*, 5(2), 193–207.
- Duran, A., & Pérez II, D. (2017). Queering la familia: A phenomenological study reconceptualizing familial capital for queer Latino men. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(8), 1149–1165.
- Eaton, A., & Rios, D. (2017). Social challenges faced by queer Latino college men: Navigating negative responses to coming out in a double minority sample of emerging adults. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 23(4), 457–467.
- Garcia, G. A., Huerta, A. H., Ramirez, J. J., & Patrón, O. E. (2017). Contexts that matter to the leadership development of Latino male college students: A mixed methods perspective. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(1), 1–18.
- Gloria, A. M., Castellanos, J., Scull, N. C., & Villegas, F. J. (2009). Psychological coping and well-being of male Latino undergraduates: Sobreviviendo la universidad. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 31(3), 317–339.
- Hirai, M., Winkel, M. H., & Popan, J. R. (2014). The role of machismo in prejudice toward lesbians and gay men: Personality traits as moderators. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 70(1), 105–110.
- Pérez II, D. (2017). In pursuit of success: Latino male college students exercising academic determination and community cultural wealth. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(2), 123–140.
- Pérez II, D., & Taylor, K. B. (2016). Cultivando logradores: Nurturing and sustaining Latino male success in higher education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 9(1), 1–19.
- Revilla, A. T. (2010). Raza womyn - making it safe to be queer: Student organizations as retention tools in higher education. *Black Women, Gender & Families*, 4(1), 37–61.
- Rios, D., & Eaton, A. A. (2016). Perceived social support in the lives of gay, bisexual, and queer Hispanic college men. *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*, 18(10), 1093–1106.
- Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in White and Latino LGB young adults. *Pediatrics*, 123(1), 346–352.
- Saenz, V. B., & Ponjuan, L. (2009). The vanishing Latino male in higher education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(1), 54–89.
- Sáenz, V. B., Ponjuan, L., & Figueroa, J. L. (2016). *Ensuring the success of Latino males in higher education: A national imperative*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Vega, G. P. (2016). Latina Lesbian students: Understanding their experiences and perceived sexual identity development at a Hispanic-serving institution. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/>
- Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, and kinship*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.

#### About the authors

**Antonio Duran, M.S.** is a doctoral student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at The Ohio State University. Contact Mr. Duran by email at: [duran.64@buckeyemail.osu.edu](mailto:duran.64@buckeyemail.osu.edu)

**David Perez II, Ph.D.** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University in Oxford, OH. Contact Dr. Perez by email at: [davidperezii@miamioh.edu](mailto:davidperezii@miamioh.edu)

