



## An Intersectionality Analysis of Latino Men in Higher Education and their Help-Seeking Behaviors

**Nolan L. Cabrera, Ph.D.**  
Assistant Professor, University of Arizona

The issue of underrepresentation of males of color in higher education has garnered a great deal of attention from scholars across the nation (Harper, 2012; Ponjuan, Clark, Sáenz, 2012; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009), but there continues to be a lack of critical dialogue and scholarship that talks about how a group that is systematically privileged (men) can concurrently be underrepresented (college). Additionally, there is a very limited empirical and theoretical foundation to base this work upon.

The scholarship on the underrepresentation of males of color in higher education empirically fails to take account of larger sociopolitical forces (e.g., SB1070) that frequently inform the dynamics of the college experience. The current state of racial politics in the state of Arizona provides a unique opportunity to examine the role of anti-Latino public policy and its relationship to the Latino student experience within institutions of higher education.

Furthermore, the work on the campus racial climate tends to not take account of gender differences that contextualize the experiences of Latinos within institutions of higher education.

In terms of masculinity research, this vein of scholarship tends to be implicitly normed around White masculinity (e.g., Connell, 2005) regarding what constitutes “manliness” (e.g., a man having a ponytail has different levels of cultural acceptability between White and Latino communities). However, when people do take account of Latino masculinity, it tends to be insufficiently critical of the patriarchal habits of this group (Abalos, 2002).

In response to these multiple contexts, Dr. Nolan L. Cabrera, Fatemma Rashwan-Soto, and Bryant Valencia explore the intersection of being Latino and being male, and its relationship to educational achievement. The qualitative study referenced in this brief is from eight semi-structured interviews with Latino male undergraduates at the University of Arizona. Exploring (1) The academic and racial stresses do Latino men face during their undergraduate experiences, (2) The help-seeking behaviors do Latino men engage in to manage the stresses in their lives, and (3) The relationship between help-seeking behaviors and Latino masculinity.

### Context: Arizona and Anti-Latina/o Policies

In 2010, the second session of the 49th Arizona State Legislature passed SB1070 (Arizona State Senate, 2010), and Governor Brewer signed it into law on April 23, 2010. The law requires police officers to check the immigration status of a person during any “legitimate contact” if “reasonable suspicion exists” that the person might be undocumented. Most critics of the legislation argue that SB1070 amounts to legalized racial profiling, and even Governor Brewer said, “I don’t know what an illegal immigrant looks like” (González, 2010). There were a number of other laws passed during this time that were also anti-Latina/o, such as HB2281 (anti-ethnic studies) and Prop107 (anti-affirmative action), but SB 1070 garnered the most national attention and has since been replicated in Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia. This offered an interesting opportunity to critically examine if and how a racist policy context affects the college experiences for Latino students.

Within this context, the following is a summary of key findings of this study:

### Racial Struggles

Many of the participants interviewed talked about issues of race-related stress they incurred during their undergraduate experiences. Some had difficulties interacting with their White peers in the form of microaggressions. Others had issues stemming from off-campus incidents, such as racial profiling. Other participants discussed difficulty coming from a predominantly Latina/o home community and trying to adjust to the culture of a predominantly White institution. Additionally, many of the participants also described stress related to the racial



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politics of Arizona—in particular SB1070. For example, many participants began carrying identification at all times even though they were U.S. citizens while also serving as drivers for undocumented family members.

### Academic Struggles

Much more than the racial challenges, the participants described substantial difficulties adapting to the rigors of academic work in college. For example, one student experienced difficulties as a result of his high school not being academically rigorous. Another described the emotional impact he experienced with feeling angry, scared, and frustrated as a result of not knowing how to navigate the challenges of college. Finally, a third described experiencing challenges in a specific math class (i.e., calculus). Most of his frustration came from realizing missed opportunities in terms of the available resources that could have helped him succeed in the class.

### Help Seeking Behaviors

When it came to participants reaching out for support they all knew the resources available but did not take advantage of them for a variety of reasons. For instance, one student who was faced with academic difficulties relied on himself instead of seeking outside assistance. Another student described feeling apprehension in asking for help as an undergraduate student, feeling vulnerability and fear. Despite participants generally feeling apprehensive about seeking help, one student revealed seeking out his best friend to “vent” to when faced with challenging situations, and he said this helped “alleviate stress” with no practical support (e.g., tutoring). Only one student stated specific people whom he sought out when he was struggling. Each person had a different function depending on his issue. He found specific supports for academic issues, professional ones, and even issues regarding leadership in his student organization.

### Conclusions

The narratives of these Latino male students were illuminating. They tended to experience stresses in their lives stemming from both racism and academic struggles; however, they seldom engaged in help-seeking behaviors. Part of this avoidance stemmed from fear of vulnerability. Given these results, researchers, policymakers, student affairs practitioners and educators need to engage men from the perspective of male privilege, while co-interrogating how they are hurting themselves in the process of trying to be “more manly.” Yes, Latino men are struggling academically, and their tensions around masculinity can make this situation worse. Institutional stakeholders should focus on ways to proactively engage Latino college males through the full complement of services that are offered and not assume that these young men will seek them out.

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### About the Author

**Nolan L. Cabrera, Ph.D.**, is an Assistant Professor in the Center for the Study of Higher Education, at the University of Arizona. Contact Dr. Cabrera by email at: [ncabrera@email.arizona.edu](mailto:ncabrera@email.arizona.edu)

