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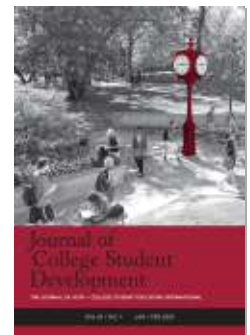
"The Traits That a Woman Has, a Man Can Have, Too": How Collegiate Latino Men Navigate Masculinity Performance

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# “The Traits That a Woman Has, a Man Can Have, Too”: How Collegiate Latino Men Navigate Masculinity Performance

Ángel González    Marissa C. Vasquez    Melissa Abeyta

*Latino men hold a contradictory position within patriarchal privilege that offers them advantages yet undermines their racial and cultural capital. Underpinned by Latino feminist masculinities, this phenomenological study explored how participants redefined characteristics of masculinity. This study provides critical insight into how 26 self-identified cisgender men of Latino or Hispanic descent made meaning of their masculinity performance. We offer three prominent findings that illustrate how Latino men deconstructed traditional masculinity and conceptualized an asset-based consciousness: (a) resisting traditional notions of machismo, (b) navigating racial and gendered expectations in academic settings, and (c) challenging cultural and gendered expectations at home. These findings illuminate the identity development process for Latino men as they negotiate their masculinities within different contexts. We provide recommendations for research and practice that encourage further exploration of the nuanced understanding of masculinity and its relation to structures that perpetuate cisheteronormativity, as well as opportunities to further deconstruct masculinity for Latino men.*

Scholarship on Latino men<sup>1</sup> in higher education has garnered much attention in recent years (Abeyta et al., 2021; Felix & Gonzalez, 2022;

Huerta & Dizon, 2021; Martinez & Huerta, 2020; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Sáenz et al., 2016). Scholars have continued to seek ways to understand the experiences and outcomes for Latino men with a focus on masculinity socialization (Abeyta, 2020; Abeyta et al., 2021; Brooms et al., 2017; Cabrera et al., 2016; Camacho, 2023; Camacho, Elliott, et al., 2023; Camacho, Salinas, et al., 2023; Harris & Harper, 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2021; Sáenz & Bukoski, 2014; Sáenz et al., 2013, 2015; Urias & Wood, 2015). While social scientists have agreed that masculinity is a socially constructed designation of expected gendered roles (Archer, 2003; Connell, 2005; O’Neil, 1981), Latino masculinity has typically been examined through the cultural lens of machismo (Gonzalez, 1996; Zinn, 1982). Traditional expressions of machismo have emphasized stoicism, homophobia and transphobia, assertiveness, and dominance (de la Cancela, 1986; Hurtado & Sinha, 2016; Mirandé, 1997; Sáenz & Bukoski, 2014). Limiting masculinity to harmful social stereotypes not only negatively impacts broader communities, it also impacts Latino men, shaping their experiences and interactions while in college (e.g., racial microaggressions). “The cisheteropatriarchy hurts us all.”

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Latino men* is used as this study pulls from gender-specific research where participants self-identified as such. *Latinx/a/o* will be used when referring to a broader community or population not specific to the referenced research or study participants.

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Mirandé (1997) challenged traditional notions of Latino masculinity, suggesting that “. . . there is no one masculine mode, but a variety of modalities that are not only different, but often contradictory” (p. 17). Such contradictions may exacerbate internal and external pressures among Latino men. These dichotomous responses further the need to consider the intersecting power dynamics of race, gender, and cultural identities that men adhere to, which may affect their college experiences (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). In seeking to understand how Latino men experience their collegiate journey, scholars and practitioners must consider Latino men as complex individuals with a variety of identity intersections that inform their perceptions of self and masculinity (Harper & Harris, 2010; Harper et al., 2011). This paper examines how Latino men understand masculinity as a multifaceted aspect of their identity that can shift and be performed as opposed to being “a static set of normative and gendered behaviors, attitudes, and practices” (López Figueroa et al., 2016, p. 61).

This study aimed to extend the current understanding of Latino masculinity within a higher education context. It was guided by the following questions: (a) How do Latino men make meaning of their racialized, gendered, and cultural expectations of masculinity? and (b) In what ways do Latino men’s social identities influence their educational experience? With a decade of literature on Latino men (Duran & Pérez, 2017; Sáenz et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2008; Urias & Wood, 2015), additional research on their masculinity performance<sup>2</sup> is still needed (Sallee & Harris, 2011). We offer insights into how Latino men make meaning of their masculinities in college.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous factors influence college access and completion for Latino men, including sense of belonging (Camacho, Elliott, et al., 2023; García-Louis et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Vasquez et al., 2020; Wood & Harris, 2020), identity dissonance and development (Duran, 2019; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018; Person et al., 2017), machismo as toxic masculinity and high-risk behaviors (Estrada et al., 2011), and internalized homophobia and transphobia that manifest in lack of help-seeking behavior (Duran, 2019, 2021; Han, 2017). Furthermore, Latino men simultaneously navigate the *choques* (tensions/clashes) of masculinity with gender stereotypes at the crossroads of their racial/ethnic identity (Duran, 2019, 2021; Duran & Perez, 2017; Baxter Magolda, 2004; Steele, 1997). Scholarship on Latino men has focused on academic outcomes (Brooms et al., 2017; Kouyoumdijian et al., 2017; Sáenz et al., 2016) and has underscored the importance of peers, family, and institutional agents. We organized our review of the literature into the following subsections: (a) the impact of validation on Latino men, (b) the social constructions of male gender roles, and (c) machismo as hegemonic masculinity.

### The Impact of Validation on Latino Men

Research on Latino men has found that peer-to-peer and faculty–student interactions are important in their college experience and persistence (Sáenz et al., 2015). Latino men experience validation through student life engagement and formal academic opportunities (i.e., undergraduate research, office hours), which allow them to develop a supportive campus

<sup>2</sup> We use *performance* as applied in Sallee and Harris (2011) that drew from theories of gender performance where contextual influences (people, time, and place) shape how individuals adopt gender expression, characteristics, and performance.

community and foster mentoring relationships (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). According to Pérez (2017), Latino men in college often relied on peers rather than faculty to achieve their academic endeavors. Peer support created a sense of social connectedness that manifested in academic support during their social transition to college, and social connectedness with peers motivated Latino men to explore other academic interests, such as undergraduate research and graduate school preparation (Pérez, 2017).

In addition to peers serving as sources of validation, research has suggested that women are key validating agents in the transfer experiences of Latino men (Sáenz et al., 2020; Vasquez et al., 2022). Sáenz and colleagues (2018) examined how family members, especially women, provided various forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to Latino men in their academic journeys. Similarly, Vasquez and colleagues (2022) underscored the many ways women figures (e.g., mothers, sisters, significant others) were sources of validation across Latino men's pre- and post-transfer process. These studies have highlighted competing expectations of masculinity, juxtaposing participants' desire for self-fulfillment (via academic endeavors) with the need to uphold gendered and cultural responsibilities (e.g., making mothers proud, meeting financial obligations). While the literature has explored the significance of external validation from institutional agents and family on academic outcomes, this study examined how such interactions may have influenced Latino men's consciousness of racialized, gendered, and cultural expectations of masculinity.

### Social Constructions of Men's Gender Roles

Given that this paper focuses on Latino men, we explored broader conceptualizations of masculinity in the published literature. Higher education scholars have argued that masculinity is a socially constructed designation of expected

gendered roles (Archer, 2003; Connell, 2005; O'Neil, 1981). O'Neil's (1981) male gender role conflict (MGRC) introduced six patterns of internalized "values, attitudes, and behaviors associated with femininity, masculinity, or both" (p. 203) that have conditioned men to (a) express restrictive emotionality; (b) be consumed by socialized control, power, and competition; (c) uphold homophobia; (d) carry an obsession with achievement and success; (e) restrict sexual and affectionate behavior; and (f) struggle with health care problems. Such patterns are grounded in cisheteropatriarchy and sexism (Alim et al., 2020; O'Neil, 1981) and perpetuate deficit-oriented expressions of masculinity that cause harm. According to O'Neil, MGRC takes place when gender roles become limiting and when the roles tied to being masculine, feminine, or androgynous harm the individual. O'Neil's research on MGRC and the fear of femininity have provided a foundation for understanding how sexist behaviors are socialized and institutionalized in educational settings. Masculinity as a concept is rooted in opposition to and fear of feminization and the historical notions of womanhood as object—thus resulting in homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, misogynoir, and violence.

Binary societal expectations of masculine and feminine roles are learned early. As such, many socialized masculine behaviors are rarely challenged as they abide by cisheteropatriarchal systems (Alim et al., 2020; O'Neil, 1981). Harris and Harper (2008) identified three agents that are essential influences on the socialization of young men: (a) parents and families, (b) same-gender peer groups, and (c) school systems. They argued that multiple masculinities exist in society; for instance, white, heterosexual, and able-bodied masculinities are socialized as dominant over racial/ethnic minoritized, queer, and physically disabled identities (Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris & Harper, 2008). Patriarchal structures do

not privilege all men equally (Connell, 2005; Kimmel & Davis, 2011) when considering the intersections of other oppressed identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation). “And, nor do we want these structures to extend Latino men privilege, but rather reckon with the nuance within such structures that reproduce harm”.

More recently, scholars have included queer Latino men in the masculinity conversation (Duran & Pérez, 2019; Eaton & Rios, 2017; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018). For example, *jotería* pedagogy has been used to explore how queer Latino men make meaning of their identities in relation to their institution and sense of belonging within higher education (Aguilar-Hernandez, 2020; Alvarez, 2014; Duran et al., 2020; Gonzalez, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2023; Orozco et al., 2021; Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Queer Latino men must navigate external performative expectations of gender identity and sexuality while also negotiating internalized homophobia (Duran, 2019; Duran et al., 2020; Eton & Rios, 2017; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018). Conceptions of masculinity are further complicated by cultural ties to *familismo*, which affirms gendered expectations within family units. Such socialization to cisheteronormativity harms queer Latino men, even from within their own families (Duran & Pérez, 2017; Orozco et al., 2023; Patron, 2021).

In addition to family, educational systems have also played a role in facilitating gender role socialization (Harris & Harper, 2008). Institutional factors, such as designations and type, have been further examined for their influence on positive experiences and outcomes for queer Latinx students. For example, scholars have critiqued whether community college Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) are intentionally assessing their practice of servingness to be inclusive of queer and trans Latinx students (Cataño & Gonzalez, 2021; Gonzalez & Cataño, 2020, 2022), which include queer- and trans-identified Latinx/o men. Other scholars

have called for examinations of men of color initiatives for similar critiques that fail to consider non-cisheteronormative identities. Hutchings (2023) explored how men of color and Black male initiative mentorship programs in higher education perpetuated the complex tensions between gender, sexuality, and race within systems of patriarchy and cisheteronormativity. Calls to interrogate educational structures and programs for men of color, including Latino men, should also consider how socioeconomic status, sexuality, immigration status, and other factors add to the complexity of student’s experiences (Huerta & Dizon, 2021). This study considered Latino men as complex individuals undergoing choques in their search for masculinity.

### Machismo as Hegemonic Masculinity

Both machismo and *caballerismo* (chivalry) serve as gender roles that uphold racialized cisheteropatriarchy. As previously mentioned, machismo is associated with hypermasculinity and chauvinism, supporting outdated notions that asking for help is a sign of weakness (Arciniega et al., 2008). Alternatively, *caballerismo* focuses on the social responsibility of being nurturing and chivalrous, which some scholars have also noted as a pull factor for Latino men in college (Arciniega et al., 2008). Scholars have called for practitioners to reframe masculinity by creating spaces for men to make meaning of their gender performance and reconceptualize masculine identities (Sallee & Harris, 2011). Reframing normalized notions of masculinity may allow for healthier development of emotional expression and feelings toward femininity, or beyond binary notions of gender expression, such as viewing school as an opportunity rather than as a feminine domain (Arciniega et al., 2008; Sáenz et al., 2018; Sáenz et al., 2015; Urias & Wood, 2015).

However, Latino men still struggle to adjust to the difficulties they encounter while pursuing

higher education due to perceived hypermasculine traits. For instance, Sáenz and colleagues (2013) explored masculinity's role in Latino men's educational experiences at community colleges. Findings from their study illustrated that Latino men avoided seeking help and had difficulty expressing emotions and vulnerability due to pride or machismo. They found that participants' construction of machismo represented both positive and challenging aspects of their identities as community college Latino students (Sáenz et al., 2013). Pride, as a product of machismo, was a source of strength and motivation that drove their competitive nature to work harder toward accomplishing their goals, but it also prevented them from seeking help when most needed (Sáenz et al., 2013). The ways men of color make meaning of their masculinity is especially worrisome, given its critical role in engaging on campus, coping with the college transition, and fostering relationships (Brooms et al., 2017). Such limited avenues for masculinity performance further the need to consider how contextual factors affect identity saliency and masculine identity development.

## GUIDING CONCEPTUAL LENS

Guided by Hurtado and Sinha's (2016) Latino feminist masculinities (LFM), this study explored how Latino men in college made meaning of race, gender, and cultural expectations in their masculinity performance. Hurtado and Sinha (2016) asserted that for Latino men, educational spaces "can facilitate awareness of how power defines relationships with others, especially when those relationships cross lines of difference based on race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexuality" (p. 14). They suggested that such awareness prompts Latino men to question the legitimacy of their own unconscious male privilege and deconstruct the concept of machismo as a cultural form of hegemonic masculinity. This newly shaped

realization among Latino men can produce the development of a feminist consciousness that challenges patriarchal/machismo ideologies (e.g., domination of women, emotional distance, denigration of intellectual activities) that are harmful to men of color (Harris et al., 2015; Sáenz et al., 2013).

Hurtado and Sinha (2016) argued that just as Chicana feminists recognize multiple feminisms (feminism, Black feminist thought, Xicana feminism), there must also be multiple masculinities, which involve the intersections of various identities in specific axis of power structures within these socially constructed contexts (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989). Informed by Anzaldúa's (1987) borderlands, Hurtado and Sinha (2016) suggested that "oppressions are not ranked nor are they conceptualized as static; rather, they are recognized as fluid systems that take on different forms and nuances depending on the context" (p. 45). For Latino men, understanding their social identities (racioethnicity/gender/class) as they navigate school, home, and themselves requires a bodymindspirit split that constantly challenges their masculinity performance.

## METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study was guided by a constructivist epistemology, which challenges the assumption that an objective reality (or singular truth) exists. Thus, we prioritized the meanings participants made of lived experiences that took place within social contexts (Broido & Manning, 2002). In alignment with constructivist epistemology, we employed phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) to explore the meaning-making of our participants' lived experiences. This methodological approach allowed us to examine factors, structures, systems, and other social constructs within our exploration of how Latino men made meaning of racial, gendered, and cultural expectations in their

masculinity performance (Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). While traditional assumptions of phenomenology reside within interests of a “subject–object divide,” meaning a divide between what is being explored and who is experiencing the phenomenon (Farrell, 2020, p. 3), we approached phenomenology through the understanding “that meaning is inherent within lived experience” (Schmidt, 2006, p. 51, as cited in Farrell, 2020). There is not a bodymindspirit split (Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 1994) but rather a want to Understand, with capital U, the experiences of our participants (Farrell, 2020). Phenomenology as a methodological pursuit aims to uncover how one’s lived experience is displayed in consciousness or the overall essence of what is occurring in such a phenomenon (Teherani et al., 2015). It seeks to describe the meaning of both what was experienced and how it was experienced by the individual (Teherani et al., 2015). For this study, phenomenology was best suited to explore Latino men’s masculinity performance as we sought to understand the essence of this unique and complex lived experience.

### Background and Context

This study was a subset of a larger tri-state research project that explored Latino men’s experiences in educational contexts in California, Florida, and Texas. In this paper, we examined the lived experiences of those attending a public four-year university in California. Data were collected between 2017 and 2018. The institution is among the leading colleges in the state, serving more than 30,000 students. The highest racial/ethnic identities represented at the institution included White (34.9%), Hispanic/Latino (28.4%), Asian (7.3%), multiple ethnicities (6.6%), and Filipino (5.8%). Because these data were from a larger study, we were limited by the original protocols and operationalization of terms and concepts. Secondary data must be used with a critical reflexive

lens that cross-examines theoretical framings of the original data to ensure epistemic alignment. Given the data collection, the findings of this study only reflect a cisheteronormative perspective of Latino men’s understanding of masculinity. Thus, we use the term *Latino* to capture the demographics of the participants and refrain from using *Latinx* as this would not have been an authentic representation of their identities and use of the term. We insist that scholars conceptualize masculinity with nonbinary and gender-nonconforming modes of masculinity or masculine gender expression and performance as part of the discourse.

### Methods and Data Collection

Purposeful and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants who were eligible to participate in the study if they (a) were over the age of 18; (b) identified as a Latino or Hispanic man; (c) had transferred from a community college; and (d) were enrolled as an undergraduate student at the four-year public institution. Initial recruitment was completed through IRB-approved emails disseminated through the transfer program at the research site. All interested participants contacted the principal investigator to schedule an interview. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were encouraged to invite anyone who met the criteria to contact the principal investigator to schedule an interview. All participants were provided with a \$25 Visa gift card for their time.

A total of 26 interviews were conducted with participants who self-identified as cis-gender men of Latino or Hispanic descent. Interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes. Demographic forms were collected to gather additional identifying information from participants. Most participants identified as Mexican (85%) and were between the ages of 21 and 28 (85%). Additionally, most were enrolled full-time (88%), were employed (81%), worked 20+ hours a week (69%), and indicated a

Table 1.  
Participant Demographic Information

Participant Name	Age	Ethnicity	Major
Roger	33	Mexican	Criminal justice
Justin	22	Mexican	Marketing
Nick	23	Mexican	Psychology
Ricardo	23	Salvadoran	Journalism
David	25	Mexican	Psychology
Carlos	32	Mexican	Psychology
Julian	39	Mexican	Accounting
Ray	22	Mexican/ Colombian	Mechanical engineering
Gabriel	22	Mexican	Sociology
Joey	24	Mexican	Kinesiology
Chris	21	Mexican	Kinesiology
Brandon	21	Mexican	Biochemistry
Adam	30	Mexican	Political science
Vincent	24	Mexican	Marketing
Matthew	21	Mexican	Forensic psychology
Ethan	23	Mexican	Multimedia art/design
Alex	23	Mexican/ Salvadoran	Aerospace engineering
Jorge	27	Mexican	Counseling
Sergio	20	Mexican	Mathematics
Damien	26	Mexican	Social science
Luis	26	Mexican	Food & nutrition
Mark	28	Mexican	Film
Erick	27	Mexican	Communications
Jesse	22	Mexican	Civil engineering
Greg	28	Mexican/ Guatemalan	Political science
Joseph	22	Mexican	Economics & environmental engineering

long-term goal of attaining a graduate degree (85%). See Table 1 for additional demographic information.

### Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded with permission from the participants. Audio files

were transcribed for analysis and uploaded to Dedoose, an online qualitative data analysis tool that enables researchers to work collaboratively on a dataset. To ensure trustworthiness, we engaged in member-checking, where each participant was given a complete draft of his interview transcript and asked to confirm that



it reflected the experiences and perspectives he shared during the interview. Participants were asked to correct and clarify any statements that did not accurately represent their experiences.

Once confirmed, transcripts were independently coded by each member of our research team. During this process, salient phrases that captured participants' meaning-making of their racial, gendered, and cultural identities within the context of masculinities were noted. We then engaged in peer debriefing meetings, in which we collectively discussed our interpretations of the data and reflected on any potential biases we may have brought forth in our coding process. Within phenomenology, the phase known as *epoche* refers to a repetitive process of removing prejudgments through an unbiased lens (Moustakas, 1994). While reducing bias is critical for analysis, we challenged the assumption that one could truly remove all biases and instead considered how our lived experiences might lend an anti-deficit lens to the analysis or potentially limit our understanding of salient identities and contexts of the participants.

We routinely reflected upon our own salient identities and were mindful of how our subjectivities influenced our meaning-making about the data. During these meetings, we engaged in critical dialogue about the data and challenged each other to be as transparent as possible about how we were making sense of the emerging findings. As researchers, we identify with the Latina/o/x community and have experience working with or have attended community colleges. We understand the complexities of navigating the academy while negotiating our collective values of *familia* in our work. Additionally, as women and queer Latinx researchers, we experience constant choques with racist, heteronormative, and patriarchal societal structures (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gonzalez, 2021, 2022). This process of being reflexive helped us to avoid hasty or shallow interpretations of the data (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002).

The initial coding process was followed by *horizontalization*, in which quotes from across all participant narratives were illuminated for commonalities (Moustakas, 1994). During this phase, we drew on LFM to identify moments in which participants defined masculinity, where they learned expectations of masculinity, and how they wrestled with these choques. Regarding the latter, we also noted racialized, gendered, and cultural nuances that shaped their conceptualization of masculinity, both at home and in college. We highlighted quotes that challenged perceptions and socialized behaviors of masculine identity (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016).

Next, a constant comparative analysis was used to cluster similar reflections, which resulted in the emergence of initial themes that were then organized into textural (what was experienced) and structural (how it was experienced) descriptions (Creswell, 2013). Textual descriptions were applied when Latino men reflected on their perceptions, interpretations, and understanding of masculinity. Meanwhile, structural descriptions were applied when participants described how their perceptions of masculinity were performed and expressed among family members, friends, peers, and other institutional agents and where they encountered such perceptions. Lastly, overarching themes that were prominent in their experiences culminated in the findings that we present below.

## FINDINGS

Similar to Hurtado and Sinha's (2016) work, the Latino men in this study created their own *avenida* to deconstruct "the oppressive aspects of masculinity" (p. 1) formulated by their lived experiences and reflection (i.e., *conocimiento*). The essence of the study is one where Latino men's educational experiences serve as *puentes* (bridges) to *feminista* consciousness as they engage their understandings of masculinity

in various contexts and begin to disrupt and deviate from formulaic perceptions of Latino manhood. Through our analysis, we arrived at three prominent themes: (a) resisting traditional notions of machismo, (b) navigating racial and gendered expectations in academic settings, and (c) challenging cultural and gendered expectations at home. We share participant reflections and our interpretations of their meaning-making in the following sections.

### Resisting Traditional Notions of Machismo

When asked to describe characteristics or traits of Latino men, participants often shared descriptions that were learned from their fathers, grandfathers, and uncles, such as being “strong,” “having a strong work ethic,” and “looking out for those around him.” For example, Joseph reflected on his father’s expressions of restrictive emotionality:

With my father, I saw him as a man because he was able to put his needs below others and was able to provide for his family, even though he was harsh on myself and all the kids. There’s also this certain aura of respect for him from being able to be stoic and not complain about the harsh work conditions he’s been put through and also the lack of opportunity that he was given.

Although Joseph’s vignette on his father’s stoic persona was intended to express selflessness, these traits perpetuate a lack of help-seeking skills needed to thrive as healthy men. While having a strong work ethic “to handle whatever to get things done” is perceived as a positive attribute, its socialization as one of the more important characteristics a Latino man should have reproduces harmful machismo. Still, participants shared how they began to challenge these notions. For example, Brandon mentioned that he resisted these expectations through reflection and awareness of toxic masculinity. He shared,

Being aware that, ‘Hey, even though you’re a male, you don’t have to be like that [stoic] all the time.’ I think that’s a big part of masculinity. Being aware of that [gender roles], it’s still challenging to tone it down, not the correct word, but just finding that balance.

Participants like Brandon expressed a sincere level of self-awareness that helped them recognize problematic behaviors instilled within their understanding of masculinity. Similarly, they validated that it was “okay” to redefine these traits for themselves. As Gabriel expressed, “You need to release your emotions because if it stays up inside, it’s a little painful sometimes.”

Like Joseph, Brandon, and Gabriel, expressing emotions and being vulnerable came up multiple times as characteristics that participants said Latino men can express in spite of stereotypical societal standards. Chris expressed his own idea of being a Latino man:

Where you can take those traits and instead of implementing them in that old patriarchal way, you implement them differently . . . It’s like a different method of being a man. You can still be a man, but that doesn’t mean you have to be THAT [emphasis added to capture intonation] type of man. It’s okay to have those emotions or feelings because you are human. Because you’re a man doesn’t mean that you’re not going to have them.

Chris’s reflection captured the feminist consciousness described by Hurtado and Sinha (2016), in which Latino men are aware of and comfortable with challenging patriarchal and cultural expectations of masculinity, particularly in relation to emotional expression. Chris’s statement reconceptualized masculine traits to include emotionality, a “different method” to be a Latino man. In other words, there is more than one way to express masculinity.

Understanding how cultural and societal expectations (i.e., machismo) manifested in

participants' experiences was a prominent topic during our interviews. Luis talked about the different gender roles placed upon Latino fathers and Latina mothers and how those roles do not have to be set in stone via traditional views:

They're societal standards. Society sees it like, 'Oh, men should do this. Men should do that,' but I think it's pretty open . . . The traits that a woman has, a man can have, too. There's nothing wrong with that. A father could be loving. A father could be caring . . . mothers have played father roles, and fathers have played mother roles. There's nothing wrong with that.

Luis challenged the expectation that fathers could not, or should not, express love and care, and he objected to the gendered "societal standards" for parenting. He conveyed that there was "nothing wrong" with having fluid expectations for both fathers and mothers, which, once again, reflected a feminist consciousness.

In addition to challenging restrictive emotionality, toxic masculinity, and expected gender roles, participants also shared examples of how they resisted messages that characterized help-seeking as a negative trait of masculinity. Adam, for example, shared how expectations for independence were communicated to him at an early age:

The independent thing, my parents have always tried to instill that, to try to be independent, try not to ask for favors too much. Because one thing that's stuck with me is this one time, my mom got mad at me because I asked an aunt for a ride home instead of walking. Because that's how she taught us, like if you can walk, if you can do it, then go for it. Why are you going to ask for help when you can do it on your own?

When asked whether this influenced his approach to asking for help in college, he stated,

Not necessarily, because when I needed help last spring, I went to ask for help. I

would go to the advisors. . . . I mean, they have a job for a reason, so might as well go ask them, and they can see what's up.

Adam understood the role of the advisor and did not allow familial messaging about masculinity to keep him from seeking help. Overall, participants were able to identify social and cultural norms that perpetuated hegemonic masculinities (e.g., stoicism, restrictive help-seeking, conventional gender roles) while also being conscious of not reproducing such ideologies, traits, and behaviors. The following theme further illustrates how participants reflected on their masculinities within academic spaces.

### **Navigating Racial and Gendered Expectations in Academic Settings**

As noted by prior scholars, Latino men hold a contradictory position within patriarchal privilege that offers them advantages, which are, in turn, undermined by their oppressed racialized and cultural experiences. Participants noted how their Latino identity (e.g., racial, gendered) was salient in academic spaces. For example, Julian, an accounting major, expressed that there were often not many Latino men in his classes,

I was in advanced classes. My classes were pretty much white people. There was just a few of us that were Latinos. In those classes, I sort of felt inferior because the few of us that were Latinos, we were like outcasts. We didn't really belong there.

Despite being at an HSI, Julian still experienced feelings of "inferiority" and of being an "outcast." These racialized contexts reduced his sense of belonging in the classroom and heightened his need to overperform. In addition to navigating predominantly white academic settings, participants had to maneuver the psychosocial reality of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1997) and academic performance. As a journalism major, Ricardo also expressed how

his identities created a hyperawareness of the negative stereotypes that are placed on Latino men in academic settings and motivated him to “prove them wrong.” He shared,

I do believe people have certain ideas of what I can do or how far I can go because of that [being Latino]. I do think the expectations of how much I can do just because of where I’m coming from; there are people that have lower expectations. . . . They get to see that I can be someone. I can go somewhere. Other people . . . I do think they see me, ‘Okay, he’s not going to get that far. He’s a Latino man.’ Let’s put it that way.

Drawing on his father’s lesson of “looking out for those around him,” Gabriel expressed a responsibility to counter the negative stereotypes about Latino men for the sake of his younger brothers. As a college student, he gained awareness of the need to disrupt broader societal and cultural expectations, sharing:

I try to set a positive example for my brothers and also try to keep in mind that stereotype to try and break down what a Latino man is supposed to be. They’re allowed to be intellectual. They’re allowed to get involved. They’re allowed to help out their community.

Participants like Julian, Ricardo, and Gabriel spoke about the choques that exist within academic spaces that fail to consider the interaction of their gender identity, racial identity, and social constructs (their performance of masculinity). As shared in the literature review, men of color negotiate their engagement within academic settings, given the denigration of intellectual activity and its feminization. As such, Latino men are often less likely than their Latina or white peers to pursue cocurricular activities (e.g., student organizations) or high-impact practices (e.g., study abroad, research). This “cool posing” (Harris et al., 2011) emerged throughout the participants’

narratives as they sought to reject negative perceptions of Latino men, such as “not finishing school,” “leaving college to work full-time,” or only being “in school for financial aid.” In fact, Joseph described how his motivation for success was fueled by his community’s lack of belief in him. He shared,

The expectations . . . within my people, I wish that they were a lot higher, but they don’t expect me to reach the level that I’m trying to reach. They’ll be surprised and happy when I do, but I feel like there’s a lot of us that aren’t really achieving certain professions or certain goals, graduating university, stuff like that.

Participants were not just engaging in the laborious process of redefining these expectations of being a Latino man among themselves and at school; they were often negotiating their scholarly, racialized, and gendered experiences at home, as well. This meant they were also challenging cultural ideas of what it means to be a student and a Latino man.

### Challenging Cultural and Gendered Expectations at Home

As previously mentioned, when the participants were asked what “being a man” meant to them, many used stereotypical masculine characteristics, such as “hard-working” and “strong.” Many times, these perceptions came from messaging at home, which was often in opposition to college expectations. While family members understood the value of education, participants struggled with gaining approval to prioritize their responsibilities as students. Damien expressed the internal conflict of having to choose between being a student and being a man as if the two were in contradiction to each other. He shared,

That’s the inner struggle, right? As you grow up . . . at least, I grew up in a Mexican, Hispanic [household]. That’s the big machismo. Then you get some education,

and your education, it's kind of defined, in a way. It's kind of like, which side do you take? Masculinity or education?

For participants such as Damien, going to school and prioritizing their studies rather than working a full-time job, finding a partner to marry and have children with, or helping their parents around the house (e.g., yard work, fixing appliances), meant that they were defying the roles prescribed to them at home. Jorge shared an interaction he had with his *tias* (aunts) who were constantly questioning him about his relationship status. He found himself challenging an old, *machista* (sexist) belief that Latino men should be focused on starting a family, emphasizing his commitment to his academics. He shared,

It's annoying hearing my aunts that live pretty close like, "Oh! When are you going to get a girlfriend? Are you thinking about a family?" I'm like, 'No!' Over and over, I've explained my whole picture is school and my career.

Participants were often placed in this *entre la espada y la pared* (between a rock and a hard place) when dealing with their scholarly identity as students and what they were expected to be as sons, as Latino men. Jorge shared his frustration with the constant questioning of his personal relationship that often invalidated the hard work he was doing as a student. Yet, family members still expected him to do well in school, land a job, and then help back at home. Damien adds how he often faced these pressures, sharing,

It's a part of making those connections . . . the assimilation piece to see how much the [education] system welcomes you. To be able to land a good job, that's paying. Realistically, that's sometimes what the family looks for, even if it's more important than your happiness. That's kind of the expectation. Because when you come over here [college], you not only have to maintain

yourself, but after you're done with your education, you have to be able to help your parents out and whoever else comes. Someone makes a sacrifice; we have to repay it.

The expectation for our participants to still perform their designated gender role as Latino men was a constant negotiation at home. There was an undertone that parents or family members expected participants' sacrifices to manifest into economic viability without realizing the strain it placed on their academic trajectories. For instance, Joey talked about how he "never grew up in a dual-income household," and thus, he and his siblings had to "step up and help the family." As a result, school became an afterthought. He added,

Going to school, I thought everybody was still cool with it. Everybody was still like, 'Hey, if you need to go get your education, that's great,' but it was more like, 'Hey, what are your plans if you're going to do that? You need to work, too.' I think when things really started changing was once I graduated from high school because I had all those expectations at that point of, 'Hey, how are you going to contribute to the family now?' Yet, they were still supportive in terms of my education.

Not only were participants challenging these academic norms with parents and themselves, but they also often served as role models for their siblings. Justin spoke about how his father assigned him this responsibility, as he was "the good one." He explained,

I was put in a position a few years ago, and that's been, 'Hey, you have to be a role model for your younger siblings.' My older brother in my dad's family, I guess, was just up to no good, just to put it like that, and my sister was not doing much. My dad kind of saw me as like, 'Hey, you're doing things right, come and talk to the kids. Be around them, show them what you can do, show them the right way of doing things.' He expected me to take that role, and I did.

For Justin, being a role model for younger generations was important. However, having this responsibility imposed on him due to the perceived faults of his siblings was stressful. Most participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the layers of responsibility of being a son or man of the family. For example, Sergio spoke to us about the distress he experienced when wanting “to do it all.” He recalled how his parents would tell him, “You have to take care of your brothers . . . you have to do something for yourself, become someone in life. You have to be the man!” Despite these messages, Sergio, like many of the participants, reflected on the need to reject traditional expectations of who they should be and prioritize who they wanted to be.

## DISCUSSION

In line with the extant literature, our findings illustrated how participants held contradictory notions of masculinity that informed how they made meaning of their identities and experiences (Duran, 2019; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018). For instance, participants were mindful of the ways traditional forms of masculinity (e.g., machismo) perpetuated harmful gender role stereotypes (Duran & Pérez, 2017; Estrada et al., 2011) and began to challenge these assumptions given their educational experiences. They rejected beliefs that Latino men could not be educated or should not be involved in their communities. Their academic capabilities and success in predominantly white educational spaces served as counternarratives to what they had been socialized to believe. Through their educational experiences, both in and outside the classroom, they questioned messages of masculinity. In academic spaces, participants were able to dispel negative stereotypes against Latino men when they sought help and succeeded academically (Brooms et al., 2017; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Sáenz et al.,

2016). At home, this same sense of confidence was complicated by cultural expectations of putting their family’s needs first. However, these Latino men pushed against what was learned through familial values, such as working full-time in lieu of attending college or finding a partner and beginning a family. They chose to dismiss these notions and re-envision what it meant to be a Latino man.

Previous scholarship has examined unique experiences in looking at Latino men’s sense of belonging (Urias & Wood, 2015; Wood & Harris, 2020), identity dissonance and development (Duran, 2019), machismo (Estrada et al., 2011), and academic outcomes (Brooms et al., 2017) as individual phenomena. Our contribution is one that situates meaning-making and the individual as central to how these phenomena occur and how they foster Latino men’s reflexivity and consciousness of their masculinity as performance (Sallee & Harris, 2011). The findings revealed that participants began to conceptualize how they performed masculinity given the choques at home, in school, with peers and family, and themselves. They began to understand masculinity as a fluid and nuanced interaction of their identities in relation to how they navigated various social contexts (i.e., academic institutions, family, relationships). The Latino men in the study were constantly pushed toward a bodymindspirit split as they traversed multiple borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987). These Latino men worked toward a feminista consciousness, which prompted them to question the legitimacy of machismo and overall masculinity performance (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Findings from this work contribute to the broader landscape of research about the experiences of Latino men in postsecondary education. Their shared narratives amplify a collective

call to further explore identity development for Latino men at the intersections of various other identities to inform future programs and services.

### Implications for Future Research

Overwhelmingly, our participants identified their Latino origin as being Mexican. Similar to the multiplicities of masculinity, Latino identities vary greatly. In the future, scholars should intentionally recruit a more diverse ethnic representation of Latino, indigenous, and Afro-Latino men and those who hold multiracioethnic identities. A more diverse sample is essential as researchers seek to better understand the breadth of experiences and narratives of this student population. Furthermore, studies should center and examine how queer Latinx/o men make meaning of masculinity and how it plays out in relation to their academic experiences. Future studies should develop an in-depth protocol that not only scaffolds questions around sexuality, masculinity, and racialized and gendered experiences but also explores such phenomena in tandem with ability, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and first-generation experiences. Some of the participants alluded to the ways in which these identities shaped their broader experiences.

Additionally, data were collected prior to the pandemic, which adds a contextual nuance for those Latino men currently navigating their masculinity performance. Future research should examine whether the pandemic exacerbated traditional gender roles. For example, were familial responsibilities amplified, and did educational aspirations persist or further develop during the pandemic? Similarly, future research could explore how the modality shifts (in-person to online, to hybrid, to in-person) impacted Latino men's masculinity performance and understanding within collegial settings.

### Implications for Practice

There are opportunities for practitioners to examine the services provided to aid students' identity development through an intersectional lens. To redefine masculinity, opportunities to deconstruct its social categorization, power, and privilege must exist within conversations of cisheteropatriarchy and its reproductions through homogenic masculinity. For example, men of color initiatives are often deemed the masculinity exploration space for Latino men; however, our participants found their way to feminist consciousness rising through other avenues. Therefore, our recommendation in this area is twofold. Faculty and administrators alike should interrogate their own conceptions of masculinity and how they uphold hegemonic ideals or promote new masculinities that aid Latino men. If there is a men of color program, those who are often seen as experts in this work should ensure that a broad and inclusive representation of masculinity is incorporated and understood, including trans masculine identities (Hutchings, 2023; Sérrano et al., 2020, 2021). These initiatives must underscore the importance of using a critical feminist queer lens, such as *jotería* identity and consciousness, to problematize Latino men's masculinity (Aguilar-Hernandez, 2023; Duran et al., 2020; Gonzalez, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2023; Orozco et al., 2021; Revilla & Santillana, 2014)

### CONCLUSION

This study sought to extend conceptualizations of Latino masculinity, particularly among college men through LFM (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). Ultimately, LFM broadens discourses on Latino men in education, and its framing helped inform how the participants in this study engaged in their own meaning-making process of masculinity performance with their social identities (racioethnic, gender, class) and

various contexts (school and home). As noted by Sáenz and Bukoski (2014), although there are frameworks for understanding Latino identity development (e.g., Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Torres, 1999; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002), scholars must consider the way that college experiences are shaped by their identity as Latino men.

Given the conflicting social locations Latino men inhabit as both beneficiaries of a cisheteropatriarchal society and as a disadvantaged group by other systems of oppression (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, classism, and heterosexism) (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989), it is important to deconstruct notions of masculinities that help Latino men and educational

leaders (administrators and faculty) better understand how to challenge institutionalized hegemonic norms. Our participants provided a glimpse of how they made meaning of their masculinity and challenged societal and cultural expectations of them as Latino men. Hurtado and Sinha (2016) provided an epistemological lens to question what other masculinities can exist that are not rooted in perpetual violence of self but instead grounded in love, care, and accountability of self.

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