
CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION AND LATINO(A) STUDENTS: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES

LISA M. RAPHAEL
MICHAEL PRESSLEY

Michigan State University

JENNIFER KANE

Rutgers University

The experience of Latino(a) undergraduates at Notre Dame was the focus of this study. In general, the students had a positive experience at the university, but one that included challenges, including physical separation from family and familiar community. Family and spiritual supports were more important to the Latino(a) students as they coped with difficulties they encountered at the university, than for a comparable sample of Anglo students attending Notre Dame.

As a major Catholic university, the University of Notre Dame actively recruits Latino(a) (hereafter Latino) students, members of a predominantly Catholic minority group in America. These efforts have been successful, with 7% of the Notre Dame student body now self-identified as Hispanic. The purpose of this study was to assess how Latino students fare at Notre Dame, focusing on how they cope with attending school in such a selective university setting.

Critical thinking at Notre Dame ranges from very traditional to progressive. The university actively attempts to support Latino students, from recruitment days with other Latino faculty and students, to providing scholarships, special masses in Spanish, academic programs relating to Latin America, and special recognition of Latino students at graduation. Notre Dame's Latino students matriculate on a campus populated mostly by Anglo students, many of whom come from families blessed with wealth and privilege. Many Anglo students at Notre Dame have had extremely limited experience with Latino populations. Such an environment has the potential to be challenging to students from a Latino culture.

The researchers had no strong preconceptions about how Latino students deal with Notre Dame. Our pre-study perspectives about Latinos at Notre Dame

were limited, informed by Latino students we had encountered on the campus. In general, we had observed much mixing of Latino students with other students, although at the same time, we were aware that Latino students embraced opportunities on the campus to participate in activities in Spanish (e.g., Spanish mass) and to be with other Latino students. We witnessed very few occasions when there were tensions between majority-culture and Latino students.

Since there were no strong hypotheses about how Latino students deal and cope with Notre Dame, this determined the research methodology selected. The study required a methodology that permitted the discovery of potential hypotheses, discovery of a theory about how Latino students negotiate Notre Dame. Grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was therefore chosen as the research methodology, with the primary data in this study being interviews of Latino students.

The early interviews included general questions about the participants' experiences as college students. Responses to these general questions were analyzed line by line to identify general categories, which emerged from the students' responses – there were no pre-existing categories. Based on the initial interviews, we were able to pinpoint the general categories of expectations and goals of the participants in coming to college as well as how expectations and goals changed during college. We also classified the academic and social challenges encountered during college as categories. The initial interviews also yielded categories of student cultural experiences as well as affective reactions (i.e., fears, degree of happiness with the college experience). Additional interviews were then conducted to refine the categories, especially targeting issues that required clarification or elaboration (i.e., emerging conclusions that were obviously incomplete based on the initial interviews). In addition to generating categories, relationships between categories were also established from the students' responses (e.g., how initial student expectations effected responses to cultural opportunities offered at Notre Dame). Interviews and analyses continued until no new categories emerged nor any new insights about relationships between categories were identified.

After completing the grounded analyses, we increased our reading of the research detailing important characteristics of Latino culture, including familism (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Massey, Zambrana, & Bell, 1995) and Latino identity (Felix-Ortiz, Newcomb, & Myers, 1994; Gloria, 2000). We also read literature pertaining to general issues of acculturation and stereotyping experienced by minority groups (Estrada, 1993; Hall, 1994; Marin, 1993; Nagy & Woods, 1992). Most importantly, we examined carefully the existing literature pertaining to Latino students' experiences in higher education in the United States (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Arnold, 1993; Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado, 1992, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Ronda & Valencia, 1994). We deferred careful study of this literature until after data collection and analyses were completed to avoid distorting the conclusions drawn from the Notre Dame interviews. Nonetheless, we knew that we could not properly position this study without understanding the previous literature.

Virtually all of the research on Latino students in American higher education has been hypothetico-deductive in the sense that the researchers had strong preconceptions about what they might find. Even studies that involved qualitative data typically focused on preconceived categories, often fairly narrow ones. However, several of these studies impressed us as being of generally good quality. They were carefully done with conclusions offered that could be rationally drawn from the data reported (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Attinasi, 1989).

For example, Arellano and Padilla (1996) interviewed very successful Latino college students about why they were successful in college. The interviewers believed that five factors might account for student success, and thus, asked questions about those five categories: parental and family characteristics, mentorship experiences, school experiences, personal characteristics, and ethnic consciousness. Based on their responses, Arellano and Padilla (1996) concluded that there were four specific influences that contributed to the success of the students they interviewed: parental encouragement, an optimistic outlook, personal persistence, and strong ethnic identification. In addition, a number of students cited the importance of a mentor or role model in encouraging their development and attainment of goals.

Attinasi (1989) provided another good example of research. The researcher interviewed Mexican-American college students and former college students about perceptions of their college experiences. These students reported that in high school they developed expectations they would attend college, ones influenced by family members or high school teachers. The success of the college visit made a difference. Interactions with representatives of the college as well as with family members who accompanied the student to visit the college influenced the student's college choice. Once at college, the students persisted by strategic negotiations of academic and social challenges they encountered. They reported that informal peer mentoring and knowledge sharing helped, as did focusing narrowly on the particular challenges they faced, such as identifying a major.

In short, empirical researchers have succeeded in identifying factors that seem to make a positive difference in the decision of Latino students to pursue and to persist in higher education. Interestingly, the empirical data were not in synchrony with a popular model of student departure from college advanced by some (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) as potentially important in explaining the high attrition rates of minorities in college. Tinto (1987, 1993) assumed that students of color need to dissociate somewhat from their own cultures to assimilate into college life. That is, to succeed in college, students of color must give up some of their values and beliefs in favor of those of the majority culture and the college, consistent with traditional assumptions of acculturation as assimilation.

An obvious objection to the Tinto position, one that makes sense based on the empirical data, is that students of color are most likely to succeed in higher education when it is possible to find alignments between their own lives and

culture and the culture of the college (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000), when they can find ways to negotiate the college that are comfortable and sensible to them. Given that Latino culture emphasizes the importance of relationships and connectedness, including with one's family (Romero, 2000), it would make sense that Latino students who succeed in college might do so when constructive peer and family supports are present. For example, Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) found that Latino student adjustment was facilitated when families permitted students the independence that college-age young adults want, but also provided support during difficult times. Similarly, participation in ethnic group affirming activities during college (e.g., cultural organizations, ethnic fraternities, religious groups) can ease the adjustment of some students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Vasquez, 1997). When Latino students perceive that college administrators are open and responsive to their concerns, there are fewer racial tensions and feelings of discrimination (Hurtado, 1994). It helps as well if the students perceive that faculty care about them (Hurtado, 1994).

As we read the literature, we believed that Cross and Vandiver (2001) emphasized an especially important point: Within any group, there is diversity in cultural-identity representations. Thus, among Latino students living in the United States, some identify more strongly with Latino culture and others more strongly with mainstream American culture. Thus, we expected diversity in how Latino students at Notre Dame responded to the institution.

In reading the literature on Latino students in higher education, we were struck that there was little attention paid to the impact of Catholicism on the collegiate experience, for Catholicism is centrally important in the lives of many Latinos. This gap in the research may have been especially salient because our review of the literature came after collecting the data for this study. As summarized in the results section of this article, we did obtain data consistent with the previous results in the literature, but we also obtained data that Catholicism plays a major role in the experiences of Latino students at Notre Dame.

The researchers came to this study as open-minded as possible about what we would find as we explored how Latino students cope with Notre Dame, that is, as we designed the study, analyzed it, and derived conclusions. We reflected on the conclusions, however, in light of previous research and theory. Thus, the methods and results section reflect the commitment to grounded theory methodology as conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and still advanced by many: We carried out the study and derived conclusions, being informed only by the data collected in the study. Even so, recognizing that this investigation occurred in the context of a larger literature, we also felt compelled after the data were collected to reflect on the contribution relative to the most pertinent literature, which we summarized briefly in this introduction. Those reflections are in the discussion section that concludes the article.

We learned a great deal about these students' experiences as we conducted the study, with the methods section reflecting that we intended the study to provide a panorama of information about Latino experiences at Notre Dame.

It is impossible in a short article to cover all of the conclusions that emerged from our data collection and analyses, so this paper focuses on the question of the challenges faced by Latino students and how these students dealt with challenges during their Notre Dame experience.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 19 Latino undergraduates (12 females, 7 males) at Notre Dame. Thirteen were of Mexican heritage, 3 Cuban, 1 Cuban and Mexican, 1 Guatemalan, and 1 Colombian. The students were from families residing in eight different states; 14 participants were born in the United States. The sample included 4 first-year students, 3 sophomores, 7 juniors, and 5 seniors. The participants represented the full range of Notre Dame majors.

Participants were recruited through an e-mail list serve sent out biweekly to the Latino student body at Notre Dame. Recipients were asked to contact the researchers if they were interested in participating in a study of the experiences of Latino undergraduates. Subsequent recruitment was more informal, with initial participants encouraging their friends to be part of the study. In addition, the Office of Multicultural Students identified some individuals who were interested. Also, fliers advertising the study were distributed at Spanish mass and posted in the Latino Studies Institute. No financial or other incentive was offered for participating in the investigation.

INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSES

Each participant was interviewed once in the fall semester, with the interview audiotaped. One interviewer asked the questions; a second took notes on the responses. During this interview, participants were asked about their expectations about college and whether those expectations were met, as well as emerging expectations ("What are your expectations now?"). The interviewer also asked students to describe what life was like for them at Notre Dame. If students commented on academic or social lives, and typically, they did, general questions about these categories followed: "What is it like for you academically (socially)? In what areas do you feel comfortable academically (socially)? Uncomfortable? How have you dealt with this?" The interviewer also probed about student goals ("What were your goals before coming to Notre Dame? What are they now? Have they changed? Why?") and motivations (What motivates you academically (socially)? What does not motivate you academically (socially?") The interviewer asked about challenges the student had confronted ("What types of challenges have you faced? How have you dealt with them?"), fears ("What were your fears before coming to Notre Dame? What are they now? How have your fears changed? Why?"), and cultural experiences ("What type of role has your cultural experiences played in your experience?"). Questioning was flexible. For example, if a student commented during early

questions about a topic tapped by later questions, the interviewer skipped those subsequent questions.

Each interview was analyzed using the method of constant comparison, as prescribed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1992). The researchers analyzed the data line by line, to identify categories that described the major themes in the student responses. The analyses were carried out as the data were collected. After each interview, the researchers reviewed the field notes independently. They then came together to discuss the emerging categories, to determine if they were identifying the same themes. Disagreements between the researchers were resolved in several ways. The researchers first attempted to combine each other's notes, searching for discrepancies in the notes that might explain discrepancies in emerging categories. If the two researchers could not come to agreement, an independent third party was consulted to search the data for categories and themes. If this consultation did not result in an agreement, the problematic conclusion was eliminated (i.e., the conclusions that survived were only those that the reviewers could unanimously agree on). There were few disagreements between the two primary researchers throughout the data analysis (i.e., involving less than 10% of the emerging conclusions). In short, throughout the study, the researchers achieved reliable coding.

All participants were asked to return for a second interview in the spring, with 12 accepting the invitation to do so. The main purpose of the second interview was to clarify and elaborate the categories and conclusions emerging from the analyses of the first-round interviews. The 12 returning interviewees were asked to respond to the following:

- Describe what you think are the elements or values of Hispanic or Latino culture.
- Describe what you think are the elements or values of American culture.
- What elements or values do you identify with? What elements or values do you not identify with? Why or why not?
- How much do you identify yourself with American culture and how much do you identify yourself with Hispanic or Latino culture?
- What about the culture specific to your group (e.g., Mexican, Cuban, Colombian)? Are there specific things that you identify with? Are there specific things that you do not identify with? How much do you identify with the culture specific to your group? (If the individual hesitated to respond, the interviewer offered prompts; for example, "Language?", "Values?", "Role?")
- How do you identify yourself?
- How do you express your identity?
- Describe what you mean by "family."
- If you had to change anything in your college experience, what would it be?
- What are the differences between comfortable and uncomfortable aspects of college? ... motivating and non-motivating aspects?
- What is your perception of the culture of the university?

This second interview also included items designed to clarify responses made by participants during the first interviews. Examples include:

- You talked about group differences among Hispanics. Provide examples of these differences in social events.
- How have you been an educator about your family struggles or culture?
- Why do you feel so at home at college?
- Why do you feel social discomfort with a lot of people?

Following the second interview, the researchers coded the data as they had after the first interview. Although there were some small clarifications and elaborations during this round of analyses, no new conclusions emerged. Again, there were few disagreements between the researchers during coding of categories and conclusions.

We asked all students in the study to provide journals where they reflected on the general questions posed in the first interview. Only three students provided such journals. These were analyzed in a line-by-line fashion, similar to the analyses of the interview data. The categories and conclusions emerging from these analyses were very comparable to the themes emerging from the analyses of the interviews.

Four participants in this study were shadowed for several days as they participated in academic, social, and cultural events. These observations yielded additional confirmation of the categories detected in the interviews. For example, a student who expressed closeness to her family was observed writing a letter to her mother, commenting to the observer that she wrote to her family each week. (Closeness to family was a prominent theme in the interviews).

Finally, the two principal researchers shared in some Latino cultural events, including participating in Spanish mass and helping a Latino campus student organization prepare a variety show. These experiences also provided confirmation of the categories identified in the interviews.

CREDIBILITY

Credibility in qualitative research is analogous to validity in quantitative research and is established through triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) across as many dimensions as possible. Triangulation validates each piece of information gathered “against at least one other source (for example, a second interview)” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 283). In the first round of interviewing, no new conclusions were drawn from the interviews of the final few students, which was critical, since data collection in a grounded theory analysis should continue as long as new conclusions are emerging from data. Similarly, in the second round of interviewing, no new conclusions emerged from the final few students interviewed. In addition, there was triangulation across different types of data—interviews, journals, and observations, with neither the journals nor observations yielding categories not identified in the interviews. Finally, an independent coder, a graduate student of Mexican American background, coded the interviews to provide a further source of triangulation.

A critical part of establishing credibility is negative case analysis, which involves searching data for examples that might disconfirm emerging categories and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By the end of the analyses, the two researchers were confident that there was nothing in the data that contradicted the conclusions reported.

Credibility increases to the extent that the conclusions drawn make sense to the participants. This is known as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, at the second interview, each of the 12 participants was shown the categories and conclusions drawn about them after the first interview. There were no objections to the emerging categories or conclusions.

RESULTS

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH NOTRE DAME

With respect to their overall undergraduate experience, 17 of the participants reported they were happy with their experience at Notre Dame. Fifteen of the students found their academic experience at Notre Dame to be fulfilling. Three felt unfulfilled academically, principally because their academic struggles weakened their confidence in their academic abilities. One student, a recent transfer to Notre Dame, had not yet formed an opinion about academic fulfillment.

Fourteen students either claimed to be culturally fulfilled or did not care much about the cultural fulfillment issue, with six reporting that Notre Dame played a supportive role in the cultural fulfillment they experienced. Of the five students who reported they were not fulfilled culturally, two resented being forced by other Latino students to think about their cultural identity, and two resented rejection by Notre Dame Hispanics because their appearance was not stereotypically Hispanic. One student felt culturally unfulfilled because she perceived herself generally to be very different from others at Notre Dame.

In short, as the challenges that follow are considered, it must be emphasized that they occurred in the context of a generally positive educational experience. Fifteen of the students explicitly recognized that Notre Dame was a unique combination of elements. One student explained it this way:

Sometimes I complain about the "bubble," but still you have a good social environment, good academics, entertainment (e.g., football), and then, the religious aspect...that I don't think you could find anywhere else.

The student interviews were filled with comments about Notre Dame as a place of dreams (2 students), a prestigious university that was a privilege to attend (7 students), a great environment for athletics (4 students), and a place filled with opportunities (4 students) and traditions (3 students). The two par-

ticipants who were not completely happy with their experience sensed a socio-cultural mismatch between themselves and Notre Dame. The challenges reported make clear that many students experienced some socio-cultural problems while at Notre Dame, but the emphasis at this point is that only two Latino students felt those difficulties to be so serious that they were substantially troubled by their experiences at the university.

CHALLENGES

The challenges reported by the participants included the following:

Eleven of the 19 participants reported experiencing great difficulties with leaving their families as they went to college. One admitted still missing home all the time, causing her not to establish any close friendships or relationships, while another reported that with her family elsewhere, she felt a large part of herself was missing.

Most participants anticipated college to be more difficult than high school, and eight reported explicitly fearing academic failure at Notre Dame. Six of the participants reported that the workload was much more than they anticipated, and one had great concerns about living up to the Notre Dame name. Another expressed:

Definitely scared that everybody would be so much smarter than me [sic]. I don't know why...I was really surprised that I got into Notre Dame.

Several students admitted having so much concern about academics that they limited their involvement in social life. One conveyed that he "didn't get into the social aspect until junior year" because he was so worried about academics. Seven of the eight, however, who expressed fear of failure also indicated that those feelings passed as they experienced Notre Dame. Something very striking was that 12 of the students reported that experiences with specific classes or professors were bad enough to undermine their academic motivation.

Five students reported that their high school prepared them well academically for the challenges at Notre Dame. Five students reported that they felt their high school did not prepare them for Notre Dame. Three of the five described their high school classes as a "joke," while two reported they had not developed good study skills in high school. Three perceived themselves as experiencing academic status changes, going from being a top student in high school to being a "little fish in a big pond."

Three students reported disliking certain characteristics of the university and the student body, including the perception that Notre Dame has an upper-middle-class mentality. Relevant to this concern, one student lamented that many students choose majors that they perceive lead to economic wealth.

Eight students reported being dissatisfied with the personalities of many students they encountered at Notre Dame, with terms like "anal," "superfi-

cial,” and “completely different from home” included in their descriptions. Seven of the students complained that the extensive use of alcohol by other students made them uncomfortable.

Two students reported experiencing discomfort being the only minority students in particular classes.

Eleven students encountered memorable stereotyping. Four were offended by assumptions that Latino families live in poverty. For example, one student recalled an especially vicious characterization of, “Mexicans as blueberry pickers with dark skin and hair.” One student admitted that for some time she did not want to ask any non-Latino student for help, fearing that other students would conclude she was only at Notre Dame because of a diversity quota. Three students experienced reverse stereotyping because they had light skin, and in general, appearances not consistent with Latino stereotypes. One of the fair-skinned Latino students recalled being at work on campus when two Latina women insulted him in Spanish, believing he could not understand them.

Ten students were from predominantly Latino home communities, with five of these students somewhat uncomfortable with the cultural environment at Notre Dame. One summarized the adjustments to the environment as follows:

When I first came... I felt very out of place....Your culture has so much to do with the ...type of person you become....the White kids were very different from the way I was...I really did go through a whole culture shock because I just wasn't used to their culture.

There was also some dissatisfaction with the Notre Dame Latino community among those students coming from communities that did not include a significant Latino population. One of these eight students had hoped for greater diversity at Notre Dame.

Two participants felt the Latino community at Notre Dame lacked a spirit of inclusion. Four explicitly expressed disapproval of the exclusionary nature of the primary Latino organizations on the campus. Seven students reported not participating in Latino cultural organizations, with four emphasizing that they identified more as “students” than Latinos. One went so far as to withdraw from interactions with everyone at Notre Dame, including others in her residence hall.

Four students reported problems with their roommates during their first year with respect to cultural differences. One described her roommate as very snobby and not understanding of her cultural background. Three felt their roommates racially discriminated against them and negatively stereotyped them.

Several students reported difficulties with language. One said that she “learned English quickly in order to have friends, but felt in between both English and Spanish.” Another student had difficulties making the transition from thinking in Spanish to writing papers in English. Six students reported

that when they thought in Spanish and attempted to speak in English, their accents were more pronounced.

In summary, although the participants reported some of the same challenges experienced by all college students, they also reported a number of problems related to their cultural minority status, including some experiences of stereotyping and discrimination. There were pressures from both majority and other Latino students, and, in some cases, there were feelings of personal inadequacy related to Latino status or home background. That Notre Dame was a generally positive experience for most participants, however, reflected that the challenges were accompanied by many supports for Latino students at Notre Dame and that the participants coped successfully as they experienced the institution.

SUPPORTS AND COPING MECHANISMS

We found it difficult to separate supports for Latino students and coping mechanisms because they were often intertwined, and hence, did not attempt to do so.

Fourteen students reported that family support was important in their pursuit of a college education. One student recalled that stories of her family's struggles were "the driving force . . . the struggle to provide a better life for us." Another student talked about how her father had struggled to attain an education, which motivated her. These comments did not reflect pressure from families, but rather student perceptions of their families' experiences as motivation to work hard. There were many comments of commitment to work ethic as consistent with the student's family's work ethic.

The students reported some interesting ways that family (and thoughts of family) permitted them to cope with being away from home. One student found that by dedicating herself to "keeping up with relationships," she felt less anxious about being away at school and separated from those she loves. Another student thought about what her grandmother was doing at that moment as a sort of secret visitation to comfort her in times of anxiety.

Family was also a motivator in another way for these students. Five students were concerned about providing well for their future families. Four discussed achieving financial self-sufficiency in contrast to her or his own family background. Financial independence was saturated with family motivation:

I know that I want to be a CEO...of my own consulting firm and travel...and to help my brother and sister to get where they want to be,...[and] make a name for myself.

Similarly, another student reported being concerned to set a good example for family members and Hispanic students back home so that they would be encouraged to attend college. One student became very motivated to develop a clearer understanding of her cultural identity because of the discrimination experienced by her mother.

Five students reported that their high schools prepared them well academically for the challenges at Notre Dame.

Some of the participants reported dealing with academic challenges by changing majors and studying harder, while a few others dealt with academic stress by exercising and scheduling leisure time.

Eight students believed that the family-like environment at the university was helpful. One commented:

When I came, I felt like everyone here understood where I was coming from. In high school...we didn't have a lot of diversity. I didn't have a really close friend in high school....The love that my family was giving to me.... The family here has almost replaced it.

Four students decided to attend Notre Dame because of the strong community feeling, with five expecting a "college family" in coming to Notre Dame. Even one student who reported being suspect of the concept of college family decided to attend Notre Dame just because of the possibility of such an atmosphere.

In general, the participants reported that interactions with other students were positive. Nine students, in fact, were comfortable in every situation, with one remarking, "The people here are amazing." One mentioned that he found the other students motivating. For example, when a friend interviewed for an internship, the participant was motivated to work harder to achieve similarly in the future.

Several students mentioned that they enjoyed introducing non-Latino students to Latino culture, for example, by bringing them to Latino events on the campus. In fact, one student reported feeling obliged to educate others about Latino culture—"It's my duty whether I want it or not."

Four students felt they disproved stereotypes as they interacted with the larger Notre Dame student body. One such student confronted a peer with his stereotypes that she must be a member of the Democratic Party, needed the government to support her parents, and must be the first in her family to go to college. The student was gratified to be able to educate this individual that none of the assumptions was true.

The participants also recognized they benefited from interactions with members of other cultures. Six claimed that they became more open minded about students from other cultures as they went through Notre Dame. One came to better understand his culture as a function of explaining it to other Notre Dame students.

Eight students reported having friends who comforted them as they confronted cultural challenges at Notre Dame. Such supportive friends were met in classes, at retreats, and through activities and organizations. Four of these especially supportive friends were other Latino students.

Twelve students reported participating in activities and organizations at Notre Dame that were principally related to Latino culture, including clubs,

Latino parties, and retreats. Two also reported involvement in organizations targeting non-Latino cultural minorities. Nine students were involved in service opportunities directly related to Latino culture.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

The spiritual experiences at Notre Dame were important: 18 of the 19 participants felt that Notre Dame provided a sense of spiritual community for them. Fifteen reported that this sense of spirituality was also part of their cultural identity. For many students, spirituality was inextricably tied to family upbringing as students connected religion to their families.

The cultural identification with Catholicism came through with respect to the Spanish masses on the campus. Six participants took part regularly in Spanish mass, with four reporting this mass provided solace from the usual cultural shock of being in a predominantly non-Latino environment. One student not only worked as a sacristan, but also organized a Latino retreat, reporting that, after the retreat, her primary social group was the participants at the retreat.

In addition to providing a cultural connection, spirituality at Notre Dame eased the academic transition to college for six students. One student's spiritual devotion guided him through academic failure. As another student struggled through coursework, her faith reassured her that she made the right decision by coming to Notre Dame.

Eight felt that the Catholic spirituality of Notre Dame was a guiding force for them, with them explicitly wanting to explore their spirituality as part of being at Notre Dame. Four came to Notre Dame because it was Catholic. As one student put it:

It's [Catholicism] really strong in my family. It was important to come here because it is so Catholic.

Seven reported that they had experienced a great deal of spiritual growth while at Notre Dame, with some of these students not previously strongly committed to their religion. One student realized the connections between Catholicism and her cultural background as she observed differences between spirituality at Notre Dame and her home. Another told a story about visiting the Grotto (a place of prayer on the campus), when she was having a difficult week. A priest approached her and asked if she wanted to talk with him. At the time she was amazed that this relative stranger "cared enough simply to talk" to her about issues in her life. This student felt the scenario was unique to a school like Notre Dame.

The students also reported that Notre Dame was a place where individual prayer was accepted. Separate from Spanish mass, eight of the Latino students chose to express their spirituality alone.

The Catholic nature of Notre Dame enabled the Latino students to form their own opinions about their spirituality that was previously emphasized by

their parents. One student found that he would rather have a “one on one with God” than practice his religion among others at mass. Another student was thankful for being able to “explore” her spirituality and truly examine the “faith you push aside” in high school.

Spirituality played a role in five of the Latino students’ goals. Spiritual experiences at Notre Dame inspired one student to “devote” herself “to others” and follow a “community service aspect of living.” Likewise, another student relied on her devotion to lead her to a career path.

DISCUSSION

Although we learned a great deal about the experiences of the Latino students at Notre Dame, an important question emerged as the results were assembled and organized, one that could not be answered by interacting only with Latino students: How unique were the experiences of the Latino students? In particular, did other Notre Dame students share their challenges? Were their supporting and coping mechanisms they used specific to their cultural uniqueness on the Notre Dame campus? Thus, we conducted a supplementary investigation, replicating the study just summarized with Anglo undergraduates at Notre Dame.

SUPPLEMENTARY INVESTIGATION: THE EXPERIENCES OF ANGLO STUDENTS AT NOTRE DAME

METHODS

As in the study of Latino students, we interviewed 19 Anglo undergraduates (12 females, 7 males) at Notre Dame. Anglo students were purposefully selected to provide a group of students as comparable as possible to the Latino students who had been interviewed. Anglo participants were recruited much as the Latino students had been recruited.

The interview process for the Anglo students was the same as for the Latino students, except only one interview was conducted with each Anglo student. Because the purpose of the study was to generate comparative information, the same questions posed to the Latino students were asked of the Anglo students. Consistent with the Latino data, constant comparative analysis was used to identify important categories and themes in the Anglo data. The results of the Anglo study are reported to highlight how the responses of the Anglo students complemented and contrasted with the responses of the Latino students.

RESULTS

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH NOTRE DAME

Similar to the Latino students, the majority (17) of the Anglo students were pleased with their undergraduate experiences. One student summarized the feelings of the majority of the students: “Awesome,” “Can’t complain at all,” and “I love every second.”

Cultural fulfillment was not an issue for the Anglo students. When asked, five of the Anglo students reported that they *did not have a cultural background*. Six of the Anglo students discussed their cultural background as being Catholic. Only three of the Anglo students expressed any displeasure with Notre Dame’s cultural environment, focusing on their perception that Notre Dame lacked diversity. Five Anglo students claimed that it was their dream to be at Notre Dame, compared to only two Latino students.

Consistent with the Latino data, the majority of the Anglo students appreciated the uniqueness of Notre Dame. The importance of the community atmosphere of the university was more prominent in the Latino comments, however, with four Latino students coming to Notre Dame because of such an atmosphere compared to only one Anglo student who did so.

CHALLENGES

Leaving the family to come to college was not as great a challenge for the Anglo students, with only 4 Anglo students reporting concerns about leaving family behind, compared to 11 of the Latino students who had such fears. Five Anglo students cited family connections as important in determining their matriculation at Notre Dame, which contrasted with the Latino students, none of whom talked about family connections as important in their decision to be at the university.

Just as was the case for Latino students, Anglo students were challenged academically at Notre Dame, with the numbers reporting such a challenge not much different from the Latino numbers. Thus, 7 Anglo students feared academic failure prior to coming to campus, and 3 continued to have such fears during their college years.

Three Anglo students felt their high schools did not prepare them well for college, with 3 Anglo students reporting their high school classes were a “joke.” However, there was one category of remark about academic issues that revealed a striking difference in experience for Anglo versus Latino students. Motivationally devastating experiences with particular classes or professors were not as common for Anglo students (i.e., 6 reported such experiences) as for Latino students (i.e., 12 reports).

As was the case for the Latino students, a minority of the Anglo students disliked aspects of the university, with 8 Anglo students feeling that the socio-cultural environment negatively impacted their overall experience at the university: Six of these 8 disliked the “shallow,” “materialistic,” and “upper

class" student body; 4 of the 8 disliked the social scene or the personalities of Notre Dame students.

Like the Latino students, a clear majority of Anglo students (15) experienced social challenges at Notre Dame (e.g., meeting friends, fitting into the social environment, and dealing with roommates). In contrast to the Latino students, however, the Anglo students did not report that the challenges were due to conflicts between their home cultures and the cultures they encountered at Notre Dame.

SUPPORTS AND COPING MECHANISMS

Family psychological support was not as prominent a theme in the Anglo student interviews as in the Latino interviews, with only 6 Anglo students mentioning such support compared to 15 Latino students. Only 5 Anglo students reported their families as sources of academic motivation, compared to 14 Latino students who made such claims.

Five Latino students and 5 Anglo students believed their high schools prepared them well for Notre Dame.

The Anglo students' handling of academic struggles mirrored the Latino students' strategies (e.g., changing majors and goals, prayer, and modifying thinking about one's potential).

For both Latino and Anglo students, about half reported that they felt socially comfortable in every situation they encountered at Notre Dame.

Just as Latino students reported that there were particular individuals who were very supportive, so it was with the Anglo students, with the numbers comparable for the two populations: That is, 5 Anglo and 3 Latino students felt special support from romantic partners; 3 Anglo and 3 Latino students reported there were particular professors who were very supportive of them.

Just as the Latino students appreciated the religious environment at Notre Dame, so did the Anglo students. For example, 15 reported that their choice of Notre Dame as a college was due, in part, to the spiritual opportunities.

The Anglo interviews were filled with many positive comments about dorm masses, spaces for spiritual reflection on the campus, various types of support in the community for spiritual expression, and service learning opportunities. Members of both groups reported that spirituality was especially important when students experienced difficulties. Thus, one Anglo student expressed feelings of disappointment when she discovered how "cliquey" Notre Dame was, dealing with the disappointment by participating in various religious organizations and clubs.

There also were powerful indications in the interviews that the spiritual resources at Notre Dame were experienced somewhat differently depending on cultural heritage. A few Anglo students discussed non-Catholic spirituality as important to them, a theme that did not occur in the Latino interviews. For most Anglo students, however, being Catholic meant being similar to almost everyone else at Notre Dame, which contrasted with the Latino students, who

reported strong commitment to spiritual experiences at Notre Dame that were specific to Latino culture.

SUMMARY

Consistent with the importance of family and community in Hispanic culture, comments about community and family were more prominent in the Latino interviews. The Latino students especially appreciated the community atmosphere at Notre Dame, missing their families more than Anglo students reported doing so. The Latino students also relied more heavily on family for psychological support. Most critically, the Anglo students did not face the cultural challenges that the Latino students faced. Being Anglo and Catholic was being like others at Notre Dame. Being Latino was being different, although the presence of Hispanic opportunities, including spiritual opportunities, made a positive difference for the Latino students. Although the Anglo students were keenly aware they were Catholic, their comments about their Catholicism were not as frequent or as intense as the comments of the Latino students. Catholicism was obviously important to Latino students as part of their identity compared to the Anglo students.

In short, the Latino experience at Notre Dame is more challenging than the Anglo student experience, although still a very good student experience because of the supports available to and constructive coping of Latino students. Some of the Latino students' most salient supports and coping mechanisms were decidedly Catholic. In contrast, Anglo students felt that Catholicism was just part of the overall Notre Dame package—a schooling environment where they felt very comfortable.

DISCUSSION

As a group, the Latino participants in this investigation were very positive about their overall experience at Notre Dame. This was despite some Latino students having trepidations about attending Notre Dame, including fears about leaving home and the familiar, including an environment in which Spanish was the primary language. The general satisfaction with Notre Dame also was striking despite some of the students' concerns about the academic demands they faced at Notre Dame. Most striking, however, was that the participants remained satisfied with Notre Dame despite some interactions at the university that were offensive to them as Latinos.

Almost all of the problematic interactions for Latino students occurred within the student community, with the Latino participants reporting that they encountered memorable negative stereotyping of Latinos by other Notre Dame students. Notably, the sole interactions with staff members that were disturbing to the participants were warnings that Latino students sometimes experience discrimination and stereotyping, reflecting that the institution is aware that Latino students coming to Notre Dame may encounter racism. It should be emphasized,

however, that racially-toned, negative interactions did not originate exclusively from non-Latino students: Some of the problematic interactions were from within the Latino student community. In particular, members of the Latino community were perceived as putting pressure on other Latino students to think in ways not appealing or compelling to some Latino students.

How could the participants have had such good experiences despite the challenges they encountered? There was much more positive about the environment and the experiences at Notre Dame than negative. Moreover, the participants reported massive support for them attending Notre Dame, making it possible for them to cope with adversity. Given the centrality of the family in Latino culture, it is sensible that support began with the family, from support for going away to college to continuing interactions as the students went through college, including when they encountered difficulties. One of the more striking themes in the interviews was that the participants' families motivated their college efforts. The participants felt they owed it to their families to do well, both the families that reared them and the families they would form after Notre Dame. They also felt they owed much to their home communities, concerned that their performance at college be a good example for others back home.

At Notre Dame, the metaphor of family is important. Students, faculty, and staff often think about themselves as part of the Notre Dame family, and there are many stories about institutional support when particular members experience difficulties. The Latino participants in this study, in particular, reported the appeal of Notre Dame's family feeling, again, perhaps reflecting the centrality of family in Latino life. Participation in the Notre Dame family saliently included many positive interactions with both Latino and other students.

The institutional support for Latino students, including clubs and activities (e.g., Spanish mass), made a positive difference for many Latino students. Among institutional supports, those related to Catholicism were among the most saliently mentioned in the Latino interviews. Eighteen of 19 Latino participants reported that they felt spiritual community at Notre Dame. There was no other claim in the interviews that was so consistent across Latino participants. Their interviews included many reports that spiritual growth had occurred at Notre Dame and substantial evidence that Catholicism was an important support in confronting challenges. What was also clear from the interviews was that spirituality was realized in diverse ways at Notre Dame, from personal prayer in the privacy of a dorm room to one-on-one discussions with ministry staffers, to public participation in Spanish masses. Even the more public forms of participation, such as the masses and retreat experiences, proved to have implications for building close, supportive, personal relationships, with the establishment of such relationships as clearly important to the Latino participants as part of their positive experiencing of Notre Dame. Despite many other socio-cultural challenges at Notre Dame, the participants reported no aversive experiences associated with their Catholicism, despite the fact that many of the participants identified with Catholicism thoroughly inter-

twined with Latino customs and preferences.

As we reflected on our results in light of the previous literature on Latinos, especially as participants in higher education, we found many points of contact. Specifically, our results are consistent with Arellano and Padilla (1996), who observed parental encouragement, optimistic outlook, personal persistence, and ethnic identification as prominent in successful college studentship for Latinos. As we highlighted, there was plenty of evidence that family was important to these students as was Latino identity. The Latino interviews were filled with optimism, for example, with only two students reporting pervasive dissatisfaction with what had happened to them in college. With respect to personal persistence, we heard many stories about how students coped with adversity and found ways to go on when the going was rough.

Similarly, there were many consistencies between the interview responses of the participants in this study and Attinasi's (1989) results. Just as occurred in that research effort, the Latino participants in this study talked about their goals with respect to higher education being formulated in high school and supported by family members. Just as campus visits made a difference to Attinasi's participants, the students in this investigation recalled events during their visit to Notre Dame that made an impact on them, effecting their decision to attend the university and their expectations about what might occur during their years in college. Just as the students in the Attinasi investigation persisted despite academic and social challenges, so did the students in this study, with both groups of students reporting that strategic efforts were important in dealing with what happened to them at Notre Dame. Informal peer mentoring and peer interactions in general were critical to the students whom Attinasi questioned, just as peer associations were centrally important to the Notre Dame students.

In contrast, we found nothing in the interviews to support Tinto's (1993) position that success in college for minorities depends on dissociating from one's own culture. Indeed, not one of our participants reported that such dissociation occurred. Rather, there was much support for the alternative (Rendon et al., 2000), that Latino students did well at Notre Dame, in part, because they could find connections between Notre Dame and their culture. The community atmosphere at Notre Dame is filled with the administrative, faculty, and staff support for Latino students, critical for minority students to feel included in a higher education setting (Hurtado, 1994).

That said, it must be emphasized that we did not emerge from this investigation with a one-size-fits-all conception of Latino studentship at Notre Dame. Rather, it was clear that the Latino students were different coming to Notre Dame, for example, with respect to academic preparation and previous interactions with non-Hispanic Americans. They were also different in how they participated in the institution, for example, studying in many different academic programs and choosing different levels and types of participation in Latino organizations on campus, from none to leadership participation. The Latino experience varied greatly from student to student at Notre Dame, con-

sistent with the general conclusion that there are vast differences in experience within cultural groups (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Indeed, by the end of the interviews, the interviewers were convinced that there were just two points of agreement across at least 90% of the Latino students: All but one were convinced of deep spiritual community at Notre Dame; and all but two felt their overall experience at Notre Dame was satisfying. In summary, there was substantial evidence of a positive higher education experience for Latinos at Notre Dame, one that was definitely and intensely Catholic in ways that very much appealed to the Latino students we interviewed. As unfamiliar as other aspects of Notre Dame were to Latino students, the Catholicism they experienced was familiar and helpful to them as they coped with the very demanding student world of Notre Dame.

One of the most important implications of this study is that the availability of Hispanic experiences for Latino students at a university can make a huge difference in the quality of their experience. Catholic colleges, in particular, should do all possible to connect with Latino students in ways that connect with the family, cultural, and language traditions of such students. Doing so makes a huge difference at Notre Dame.

We urge additional study about the impact of Catholic experiences, especially ones that connect to Hispanic experiences, on Latino students, both students enrolled in Catholic colleges and secular institutions served by Newman and other campus ministry centers.

The data reported permit the serious hypotheses that such experiences might increase the likelihood of Latino students attending college, persisting there, and finding the experience to be positive.

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Michael Pressley is a professor of teacher education, counseling, educational psychology, and special education at Michigan State University, Lisa Raphael is a doctoral student in educational psychology at Michigan State University, and Jennifer Kane is a graduate student in counseling psychology at Rutgers University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Michael Pressley, Department of Education, Michigan State University, 118 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.