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**LLEVO RESILIENCIA EN LA FRENTE: THE INFLUENCE OF
COMMUNITY ON THE THRIVING OF LATINAS IN COLLEGE**

by

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Abstract

Latinas in college are systematically disadvantaged and face many unique stressors and adversities such as race-related discrimination and family stress; however, perceived availability of social support has been shown to have positive effects on students, such as positively influencing adjustment and academic persistence. In an effort to determine what factors help Latinas thrive in college, an experimental study with a 2x2 factorial design is proposed to investigate if in the face of adversity, does peer support/community preserve the thriving of Latinas in college. Community is defined by sense of membership and validation, and both will be manipulated in the in-lab community experience through a confederate (race of the confederate x support offered). The results are expected to show that main effects in the influence of validation on thriving and main effects in the influence of sense of membership on thriving. Furthermore, an interaction is predicted such that the effect of being validated depends on whether or not the confederate is Latina. It is also predicted that participants will feel a higher sense of communality with Latina students than Latinx students. The proposed study works to add to the small body of literature that highlights ways to help underrepresented students in higher education, rather than simply investigating factors that work to their detriment. The implications of the research are to work to legitimize community as a form of self-care and support, so that institutions help foster and support Latina communities on college campuses.

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The Latinx population has played pivotal roles in the development, labor, and history of the United States (Estrada, García, Macías, & Maldonado, 1981; Heyman, 1998), but the community continues to be sorely underrepresented and unsupported in multiple institutions such as higher education. There is systematic and institutional discrimination against Hispanic students because research shows that they are less likely than White students to enroll into a four-year college, 56% for Hispanic students versus 72% for White students, less likely to attend a selective college, less likely to be enrolled in college full-time, and less likely to get their degree (Fry & Taylor, 2013). In 2012, only 9% of the young adults aged 25-29 with a Bachelor's degree were Hispanic, which is an exceedingly low number compared to 69% of White young adults with a degree in the same age range (Fry, 2014). Furthermore, as far as the timeline for degree attainment goes, 42.6% of White students graduate with their degree in four years whereas only 25.8% of Latinx students graduate in the same amount of time. (DeAngelo, Franke, & Hurtado, 2011). The performance and drop-out rate of Latinx students in higher education calls for investigation as to what changes need to be made for an equitable chance at a degree, especially because education is essential to achieve tangible social mobility.

While the population of college students graduating and getting degrees in the U.S. is still extremely White, the future of Hispanic and Latinx students enrolling in college looks bright. According to the Pew Research Center, college enrollment in the Hispanic community for students aged 18-24 increased from 12% in 2009, to 18% in 2013, (Fry, 2014), and that number is projected to continue increasing. Furthermore, the National Center for Education Statistics

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projects a 42% increase in college enrollment for Hispanics between 2010 and 2021 (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). But for those Latinx students who are already in college, these experiences can be oppressive and traumatic, which may lead to higher dropout rates and fewer Latinx students getting their degrees. And the mental health of Latinx students is vulnerable because of the unique stressors that this population experiences, such as racial discrimination and family dynamic. With these disparities between White and Latinx retention and achievement in college, it is incredibly important that the literature investigates the unique experience of Latinx students, especially Latina women, in college.

Adversity in the Latinx College Experience: Racial Discrimination

There is quite a bit of literature around the experience of Latinx students in college that suggests that they have a different experience than non-Latinx students because of their background and unique stressors in higher education. In other words, their mental health may be at risk because of race-related stress. For example, in a survey design, Arbona & Jimenez (2014) examined the effect minority stress has on the depressive symptoms that Latino/a college students present. Researchers found that ethnic minority stress was uniquely related to depressive symptoms when controlling for general college stress. When looking at specific components of general college stress, stress about academics and stress about personal relationships were correlated with depressive symptoms. When looking at components of minority stress, negative perceptions of campus climate and concerns with their potential for academic success uniquely contributed to depressive symptoms when controlling for general college stress (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014). The latter two are understandably related to ethnic minority stress because many students who come from underrepresented communities experience impostor syndrome, feeling

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like they do not belong or are not smart enough compared to the people around them, which is correlated to symptoms of depression and anxiety for some students (Cokley et al., 2017).

Related to the effects of racial stress, Cheng & Mallinckrodt (2015) conducted a longitudinal study, and found that experiences of racial discrimination were positively associated with alcohol problems and symptoms of PTSD in college students, supporting the notion that racial and ethnic discrimination is a form of traumatic stress, and the wellbeing of Latinx students is at risk. In a one-year longitudinal study, Lopez (2005) found that first year Latinx students reported race-related stress the least at the beginning of the year, but that stress increased over time. The study suggests that there is a decrease in intragroup stress and increase in racial stress as the year progressed, such that Latinos see their same-race peers as a source of support rather than a source of stress as the year progresses. The result is that race-related stress increased, thus demonstrating that Latinx students experience race-related adversity. However, the results also suggest that peers became more of a resource; therefore, Lopez helps suggest and demonstrate that peer support may serve as a legitimate mechanism to buffer adversity.

In the positive psychology literature, researchers have also found a relationship between adversity and decreased positive functioning. Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people and groups (Gable & Haidt, 2005), and positive functioning is one of these domains. The subject of race-related stress is not just a subject in psychopathology, but is also researched in terms of positive functioning, such as well-being. For example, Crockett et al. (2007) found a negative relationship between acculturative stress and psychological functioning, and French and Chavez (2010) found a positive relationship between ethnic identity/ethnicity-related stressors and well-being, such that those who had more negative perceptions of ethnic identity had lower senses of

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well-being. The literature demonstrates negative effects of ethnic and racial discrimination, which take a toll on the well-being of Latinx students in college, not just on their performance. Thus, it is important to investigate what factors can buffer the negative effects and increase the well-being of Latinx students in the face of adversity.

Why Focus on Latinas?

Even within the Latinx population, there are several additional unique factors that affect students' identities, experiences, and access to a college education and degree. The different identities and experiences that Latinx students have underscore the importance of looking at the intersections between various social identities and their combined effects on students. For example, for first generation Latina students, family relationships may become complicated and a potential stressor because first generation Latinas go into college wanting to do well for their families, but also may be leaving their families for the first time, so they have to figure out whether to prioritize their families or school (Gloria & Castellano, 2012). In a different study, Ojeda, Navarro, Rosales Meza, & Arbona (2012) examined which specific factors are correlated with life satisfaction in Latinx students, and found that age and gender were individually significant predictors of life satisfaction when grouped with ethnicity-related stressors. In other words, younger students and women college students reported lower life satisfaction than older students and male students. Therefore, younger female students who are cognizant of their ethnic identity when navigating college are expected to have a lower life satisfaction than other Latinx students, thus highlighting why studying Latinas in college is particularly valuable and needed.

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Keeping in mind the multitude of adversities that Latina students go through during college, it is imperative to consider the experience of underrepresented communities and what strategies to cope with adversity may be successful in some compared to others because context and cultural influences are important. Sonn and Fisher (1998) highlight that the literature on group responses to oppression focuses on the negative. Thus, the proposed study will discuss and research community and thriving in the cultural and social context of the Latina identity and experience while focusing on the positive to add productive and actionable knowledge to the literature. The study will examine the intersection between race and gender, by examining the experience of Latina students. The proposed study will also look into the factors that influence the thriving of Latinas in order to succeed in college, such as community from peers in college.

A Caveat on Ethnicity, Gender, and the use of the Word *Latina* and *Latinx*

While approaching and reading the following proposal, it is important to recognize that many of the terms being used to categorize samples and people are all constructed and not representative of an entire group's experience. For instance, when discussing ethnicity and race, it is essential to remember that both identifiers are constructed and are not inclusive nor holistic. Much of the literature use Hispanic or Latino/a to mean the same population, but there is a difference between "Latinx" people and "Hispanic" people. Shortly put, "Latinx" describes people who are from a Latin American country, including the Caribbean, whereas "Hispanic" describes people who are from a Spanish-speaking country, including Spain (Marcano, 2017). The distinction needs to be addressed because it is vital to respect those who do not want to identify with the colonizer if the country they are ethnically from has a history of oppression and colonization, especially if it was perpetrated by Spain. Also, even within the construction of

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“Latinx” people, it is important to remember that Latinx people are not part of a homogenous population, and there are many cultures, countries, and languages that fit under this general umbrella, and it is imperative to not erase those differences or cultures.

In a similar fashion, it is also essential to remember that gender is as much a construct as race. This study will be focusing on and using the term “Latina”, while recognizing that this term is gendered and not inclusive of trans, non-binary, or genderqueer Latinx people. The potential study participants include people who do not identify anywhere on the woman-man gender binaries, but the researcher uses the term “Latina” to easily encompass the group being studied. While the cisgender woman experience varies greatly from a trans or non-binary experience, these are all marginalized gender identities. Therefore, any Latinx identifying person who is not a cisgender male could potentially participate in the proposed study. The researcher will use terms such as “Latinx,” “Latina,” “women,” “females,” etc., but is completely acknowledging and apologizing for the exclusionary consequences of such language. The discussion of previous literature uses the language of those researchers, but does not necessarily support the labels used. In the proposed study, the categorization serves the purpose of putting a name to the community while trying to be as inclusive as possible, and it is not in an effort to invalidate any individual’s identity.

Family Dynamic for Latinx Students: The Negative and Positive

Family as a stressor for Latinx students

There is literature suggesting that family can be a mediator that may increase college stress and negatively affect adjustment for Latinas. As previously discussed, Gloria and Castellanos (2012) found that family relationships may become complicated and a potential

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stressor for first generation Latinas. Additionally, Llamas & Morgan Consoli (2012) found that students experiencing intragroup marginalization in their family had a more difficult time adjusting to college, had lower levels of resilience and thriving, and familial support did not predict college adjustment when controlling for intragroup marginalization. That is to say that students coming into college feeling that they are not conforming to their family's norms or expectations will have a harder time adjusting and surviving. Another study supporting the notion that family dynamic could be a negative influence for Latinx students in college was conducted by Rodriguez et al. (2007). The researchers showed that family conflict was positively correlated with psychological distress. For those for whom family may be a potential stressor and another source of adversity, it is important that they seek support through other systems, such as peer community and support on campus to help them thrive.

Family dynamic as a model for social support in college

In addition to the research suggesting that family is an added stressor, there is also evidence that family is a positive support system for some Latinx students (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004; Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016), and this research models and frames the importance of community from peers when Latinas are in college. To start, the research on the family dynamic of Latinx people suggests that they may come into college from a different style of familial and community support than typically expected in the United States. Specifically, it is well established in the literature that Latinx families tend to be more interdependent and collectivist than Anglo families, (Sabogal et al., 1987). Exemplifying a tight family dynamic, Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers (2007) found that having a strong connection to Mexican and American identity was associated with having a strong sense of familism, and the importance of family was high for their entire sample. Furthermore, Rodriguez et al.'s results

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suggested that women perceived greater family support, and family support was negatively associated with psychological distress. Once on campus however, the patterns of collectivism and unique familial support suddenly are missing, and this is where the importance of having peer support comes in. Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill (2016) found that contrary to the individualistic culture in universities, Latino American students are more likely to endorse helping behavior, interaction, and be aware of non-family members, such as friends, neighbors, and classmates, compared to non-Latino students. This finding helps build the proposed model that community moderates the effects of adversity on thriving because Latino American students engage in more community-like behaviors more than their peers.

Family support was also a significant predictor of college adjustment, thriving, and a relief for college-related stressors in Mexican-American college students (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004; Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016). Because of the strong group ties typical in Latinx families (Sabogal et al., 1987), family support can play a very important role in the adjustment to college for Latinas as a positive support system. And given the interdependence of Latinx culture, peer support and community as a moderator may be particular powerful to predicting thriving after adversity. For example, Rodriguez et al. (2003) found that support from friends and peers contributed to the well-being of Latino students. And for female students who carry a heavier burden of acculturative and general college stress, friend and peer support protected against distress more than family support. As has been expressed, the well-being of Latinx students in college is vulnerable, therefore Rodriguez et al. (2003) highlight the importance of investigating Latina peer support and community as moderator between adversity and thriving.

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To further justify how peer support can become a proxy to family support for Latinas to thrive in college, the “comadre” approach, as it is to be discussed, may also help build this framework. Rayle, Sand, Brucato, & Ortega (2006) wrote about the effect of “comadre-ismo” using the “comadre” approach as a method of group social support with female Mexican immigrants. In Spanish, a “comadre” is an extended female member of the family, but this person is as close as true-blood relation family (Rayle et al., 2006). The article explained that the “comadre” group was similar to group counseling, and researchers discussed how the aim of the group was for the immigrant women to learn how to succeed, relieve stress, learn self-care, and help them feel more confident and strong navigating being an immigrant in the U.S. The group sessions were led in Spanish by group leaders, and each group of four sessions had their own theme varying from introduction to wellness, self-help, self-care, and goal setting. In post-group interviews, women stated that having Latina leaders was effective, and the researchers found a significant increase in the wellness of the women (Rayle et al., 2006). Therefore, this idea of “comadre-ismo,” promoting wellness through group work, served as a form of community for the Mexican immigrant women, and can potentially be, or perhaps already is, modeled by college Latinas. Seeing as this method was successful for immigrant Mexican women, a similar method of having community support from peers who come from a similar background may be beneficial to young Latinas. Especially given the interdependence typical in Latinx families in mind, Latinas may need a similar family and community in college to thrive.

Definition and Positive Effects of Community

The significant toll that race-related stressors take on the well-being of Latinas is just the beginning of all the daily adversities that Latina students face in college. With the adversity that

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comes from regular college stress and the stress from being marginalized students, it is important that they find ways to survive and thrive. In general, perceived availability of support protects one from high levels of stress and provides resources (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Sonn & Fisher, 1998), and is therefore an important variable to be investigated. Cohen and Hoberman found that perceived availability of social support was negatively correlated to depression in college students and also helped protect participants from the pathogenic effects of experiencing high levels of stress. Sonn and Fisher suggest that having a sense of community membership is an essential source of well-being that also protected against alienation and psychosocial and behavioral disorders.

However, there are varying definitions of community used in the literature. For the purpose of this study, the term “community” will be used to encompass peer support from other students on campus who come from the same ethnic background, and the definition of what community looks like will be modeled after the construct as assessed by the Sense of Community Index (SCI) (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986). The SCI proposes four components that define community (sense of membership, influence, sharing of values, and sense of emotional connection), but this study will focus on two components, membership and shared emotional connection. Having a sense of membership means that the constituents feel a sense of belonging in their group, emotional investment, and emotional safety (Chavis et al., 1986). Having a sense of shared emotional connection means that members value and honor each other and have a sense of commitment to each other and to the cohesiveness and investment of the group (Chavis et al., 1986). Due to the design of the proposed study, there is not a significant enough interaction between participants and confederates to assess or find a change in this definition of shared emotional connection, so the study will measure perceived understanding,

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also known as validation, instead. Validation is defined as the degree to which one person feels that their partner understands their perspective, thoughts, and feelings from their point of view (Gordon & Chen, 2016). Gordon & Chen (2016) found that perceived understanding protects relationships from the negative effects of conflict in relationships. In the proposed study, the buffer that validation that confederate does or does not provide will be measured in the interaction to explore whether those who feel validated by their partner will feel a shared connection, and whether sympathy and responsiveness from their partner will increase their sense of community. While this literature is not specific to Latinx interdependence or community, the findings are still relevant and applicable to help demonstrate the importance of community in the thriving of Latinas in college. In defining community, it is important to highlight that community is not the same as critical mass, and coexistence does not mean community. As explained in the definition above modeled after Chavis et al., community requires emotional and social connection as well as investment to help its members thrive, and the proposed study will also investigate if there is difference between the influence of co-existing and the influence of engaging with each other in the thriving of Latinas.

Thriving

To understand why measuring thriving is important to the research of marginalized communities, it is beneficial to look at the importance of positive psychology and its theories. As defined above, positive psychology, is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people and groups, and these processes are important to understand in their own right (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Understanding the positive, or protective factors, can help prevent or lessen the damage of disease, stress, and disorder (Gable & Haidt,

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2005). A large part of the psychological literature focuses on the negative events in the human experience (Gable & Haidt, 2005). However, positive psychology works to highlight how the presence of positive strengths and connections indicate well-being, instead of just assuming that the absence of the negative means having good mental health. The researcher of the proposed study is interested in thriving as the presence of positive rather than the absence of the negative. Furthermore, this study is trying to go against the norm in oppression literature of focusing on the negative aspects of oppression, and instead works to highlight the positive to help marginalized students.

Much like the definition of community, there are multiple and varying definitions of what thriving means, but for the sake of this study, thriving will be modeled after Carol Ryff's (1989) six dimensions of well-being. Ryff's dimensions are self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal mastery. The proposed study will focus on self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy because each of these components are key to a positive sense of well-being, and thus a positive sense of thriving. Ryff defines self-acceptance as having a positive attitude towards the self and acknowledging and accepting the multiple sides of oneself, including the good and bad qualities. Self-acceptance is one of the components because of the difficulties for college Latinas may face in order to accept themselves. As previously discussed, Latinas face many unique stressors and adversities, and many of them are related to discriminatory stress, such as impostor syndrome. Because there is a lack of representation of Latinas in the student body in predominantly White institutions (PWI), it may be harder to accept oneself as enough or deserving of good things. Xu et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between self-acceptance, mindfulness, and well-being in students in college. Self-acceptance is positively correlated with well-being and the mental health of college

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students. Therefore, self-acceptance is core element of well-being and thriving, and it will be examined through the Latina lens.

The second component that defines thriving is personal growth, which Ryff (1989) defines as having the feeling of continued development, seeing oneself as growing and expanding, being open to new experiences, having a sense of realizing their potential, seeing improvement in self and behavior over time, and changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness. Personal growth is a central factor to investigate, especially in college students because it is a time where students are offered and may open up to many new experiences. Students are going to develop socially, academically, and personally, and because of the many new experiences students will be exposed to, personal growth is important in order to be able to develop into oneself as young adults.

Lastly, autonomy is the third component of interest being measured to define thriving because of the relevance it has to college students. Autonomy is defined as being self-determining and independent, being able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways, regulating behavior from within, and evaluating oneself by personal standards (Ryff, 1989). Autonomy is also important to the definition of thriving for this population because for many students, especially students who come from interdependent family backgrounds typical in Latinx families, college will be time of newfound independence, and being able to become self-driven and self-determined is key to thriving in such a new environment. Especially as women, and women of color, being able to gain independence and resisting pressures from others is essential to exercising agency. Together, self-acceptance, personal growth, and autonomy adequately sum up thriving for Latina college students facing adversity, and this is what having community should help them achieve.

The Proposed Study

The proposed study investigates the positive influences of community, or also called peer support, on Latinas in college and how it affects their thriving after facing unique adversity in college. It is important to note, however, that this study will be investigating these variables through a very brief snapshot of adversity and community and a brief exploration of the characteristic interactions that can happen on a daily basis. The conditions created in the lab are not meant to transform or define participant's experiences, but similar to couples studies, will provide a brief index of the mental health of participants and ways to buffer adversity. Of those studies that investigate Latinx or Latina students in college, they tend to focus on the negative experiences of these populations without looking into what mediates the hardships or stressors. While this literature is incredibly important to pinpoint and understand what factors are negatively affecting marginalized students, it is also valuable and vital to understand which factors help marginalized students, especially women of color, thrive on college campuses. Having said that, the following study still fills in an important gap in the literature because much of the literature focusing on thriving is not specific to Latinx populations, let alone Latinas who are in college. There is not a lot of research on alternative ways in which groups maintain their culture and identities, and Sonn and Fisher (1998) suggest that research on adapting and coping is usually based on the cultural values and norms of the White middle class, and marginalized groups are not researched in their unique experiences in terms of their own community resilience. Furthermore, of the literature that focuses on positive protective factors, such as thriving, the narrative is often White-washed or not intersectional by generalizing samples that are majority White or by generalizing and homogenizing the experiences of women of color

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from that of White men or men of color. Finally, this proposed study is very important and fills a gap because it is one of few studies that researches the influence of peer support for Latinas, rather than just family support, about which there are mixed findings.

The purpose of the proposed study is to test whether peer support from other Latinas has a positive influence on the thriving of Latinas after facing adversity. The proposed model is that Latinas in college face various daily adversities that have a negative impact on their ability to thrive, but community support from other Latina students buffers the negative impact of the adversity and helps them thrive in college. The main hypothesis of the study is that having peer support from a Latina student after facing adversity will positively influence a Latina's sense of thriving, especially when compared to either not having that support or not having that support from a Latina student. The hypotheses will be tested through an experimental study involving Latina participants facing adversity that will be presented in-lab, and each participant will be in one of four conditions based on a 2x2 factorial design manipulating the race of the female confederate, who will be present during and after the adversity, and whether or not the confederate provides support or not after the adversity. Both race of the confederate and support offered represent components of the definition of community, sense of membership and validation. The proposed study will measure sense of community and thriving to determine if sense of community moderates the relationship between adversity and thriving. The hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Participants who interact with the Latina confederate will have a stronger sense of thriving than those who had a White confederate.

Hypothesis 2. Participants who are offered support and validation from the confederate will have a higher sense of thriving than those who did not have support or validation.

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Hypothesis 3. There will be an interaction between the race of the confederate and the support offered from the confederate on thriving such that the influence of whether support is offered or not will be stronger if the confederate is Latina as opposed to White.

Hypothesis 4: Participants will have a significantly greater sense of community with Latina students than with Latinx students.

Proposed Method

Participants

Because the goal of the study is to examine how sense of community affects thriving in Latinas, the participants will be female, transgender, or non-binary students who self-identify as Latina or Latinx. All participants will be enrolled in an undergraduate degree program as full-time students. The existing literature suggests small effect sizes (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004; Cheng & Mallinckrodt, 2015). A power analysis was conducted and indicated that to achieve a power of .80 with an α of .05 in a 2x2 design, 788 participants are needed (Cohen, 1992). Participants will be college aged students ranging from 18-22 years old.

Participants will be recruited through announcements made by the researcher at a meeting of Latinx affinity groups of local colleges universities. However, if the leadership boards of the groups do not feel comfortable with someone coming into their space to recruit, flyers will also be available to share in those groups. Additionally, posts on social media pages for Latinx groups and flyers posted in multicultural or student of color-centered spaces will be used. Participants will be compensated with a \$25 Amazon gift card for their participation, and will be treated in accord with the APA Ethical Principles on conducting human research with human participants.

Materials

Adversity Situation. All participants will experience the same adversity across all conditions before engaging with their manipulation. The adversity will consist of two confederates walking past the participant who will overhear one of them making an ignorant comment sensitive to the Latinx community such as “I’m not racist, but I thought my cleaning lady in my dorm was a Mexican lady who didn’t speak English.” Afterwards, the participant will experience one of four different conditions based on manipulations involving a confederate in a 2 (race of the confederate) x 2 (support offered) fully crossed between groups factorial design. The race of the female confederate who will seem like another participant will be either Latina or White. The appearance of the confederates will be pilot tested in advances to confirm that the participants will be able to accurately determine that confederate presents and passes as Latina or White. The condition of the support offered will either be the participant and confederate processing the significance of the macroaggression they just overheard, or talking about campus dining halls while ignoring the adversity just experienced. In the supportive condition, the confederate will instigate conversation and the two will discuss how the comment was a serious macroaggression, and how ignorance is so easily ignored by most privileged people. The confederate will talk about how unfortunate it is that students of color have to deal with the result, and that what the person passing by just said was not okay. In the non-supportive condition, the confederate will instigate a conversation about what dining hall they like the best because they do not know where to go eat that day. In the non-supportive condition, the confederate will not discuss the adversity just experienced. Thus, the resulting conditions are a Latina confederate who engages with the participant to process the adversity, a Latina

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confederate who does not process the adversity with the participant, a White student who engages with the participant to process the adversity, and a White student who does not process the adversity with the participant. All other variables, such as adversity, approachability of the confederate, general size and age of the confederate, location, and topic discussed for those who do not process the adversity, will be held constant across conditions.

Sense of Community. As the manipulation check, participants will complete a few questions to measure the effectiveness of the four conditions used. The first set of questions will come from Marigold, Cavallo, Holmes, & Wood's (2014) Perceived Social Support Measure (PSSM). Specifically, the final four items which are meant to measure responsiveness will be used. The PSSM is based on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Never occurred/Not true of my friend – 7 = Occurred all of the time/Very true of my friend). The scale will be scored as a composite score. Researchers found a strong Cronbach's α of .92 (Marigold et al., 2014). The scale items include, "He/she understood me," "He/she made me feel like they valued my abilities and opinions," "He/she made me feel cared for," and "I was satisfied with the support I received from him/her." Participants will fill out the PSSM for both the confederate, the Latina community, and the Latinx community to assess if gender does make a difference and adds an extra layer of support for Latinas. Consequently, for the Latina community, a sample item would read, "Latina students on campus make me feel cared for," or "I am satisfied with the support I receive from Latina students on campus." For the Latinx community, a sample item would read, "Latinx students on campus make me feel like they value my abilities and opinions," or "Latinx students understand me." For the confederate scale, the pronoun "She" will be kept. Both Latina and Latinx community scales will be edited into the present tense, and the confederate scale will stay in the past tense. The final question in the sense of community measure will be a question

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asking, “What race did the other participant in the hallway waiting with you present as?” The answer options will be somewhat modeled after the options offered on Census forms: “White,” “Black/African-American,” “Latinx,” “Indigenous/American Indian/ Alaskan Native,” “Asian/Asian American,” and “Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander” (USCB, 2013). This question is asked to ensure that the participant was aware of their race to properly be able to assess sense of membership.

Thriving. Participants will complete a survey to measure their state levels of thriving and future thriving. The purpose of the measure is to operationalize what seems like the most common themes in the psychological well-being research (Ryff, 1989). For the purpose of the study, thriving will be measured based on the more personal and individual domains, which means Environmental Mastery, Positive Relations with Others, and Purpose in Life were excluded. Thriving will be measured based on three subscales from the Psychological Well-Being measure (Ryff, 1989). Specifically, participants will be prompted to complete the Autonomy, Personal Growth, and, Self-Acceptance subscales. Each subscale includes 7 items, and participants will respond by using a 5-point scale (1 “Strongly Disagree” – 5 “Strongly Agree”). These three subscales were chosen because they are the most relevant and critical subscales to measure thriving relative to Latinas in college. Because the researcher seeks to measure the state level of thriving and future thriving, some of the items in the relevant subscales had to be re-worded to put them in the future tense. For example, “I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time” was adapted to “I have the sense that I will develop a lot as a person over time” and “For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth” was adapted to “For me, life will be a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.” It is important to note that, consistent with the original scale, a few of the statements

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will be reverse-scored. According to Ryff, the subscales can be scored independently with the range being 5-35. However, a composite score will be used to account for potential missing data. High scores in each of the subscales indicate more sense of autonomy, sense of future growth, and self-acceptance.

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants will complete a questionnaire that will acquire information about their background. This questionnaire will include questions regarding age, gender, socioeconomic status, generational status, and Latinx ethnicity. Participants will complete an open-ended questionnaire related to age, Latinx ethnicity, and gender. They will also complete a fixed-format questionnaire based on socioeconomic status and generational status.

Procedure

The proposed study will be conducted in a laboratory setting, with the lab session lasting 30-45 minutes. The participant will complete the informed consent procedure upon arriving to the lab. The participant will then be randomly assigned to one of the four conditions and will be told to wait in the hallway, where their confederate is already waiting, while the paperwork is set up. Participants will then experience the adversity of hearing confederates make ignorant comments down the hall, and will engage in their respective conditions.

Afterwards, participants will be called into the lab to complete the measures on sense of community and thriving. The order in which they complete the two measures will be alternated across participants. However, the scale asking about their sense of community with the confederate will be left last to not hint to the participant that their interaction wasn't real. After the participant completes the surveys, the researcher will direct them to another room where they will be told that they can pick up their payment. Once the participant reaches the next room, the

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other researcher will welcome them and ask for feedback on their experience, with a vague question like “Did you notice anything unusual in the study? Were there any aspects that felt inauthentic?” in order to narrow down and ask the participant about the confederate in their specific condition, and as a check to see if the participant saw through the deception. Afterwards, there will be a complete process debrief where the participant will be informed about the role of the confederates and the deception they just experienced. During the debrief, researchers will do a reflection exercise with the participant, asking them to think about a time where they felt happy or supported. The researcher will make sure to restore their mood before they leave. If their mood cannot be restored, the researcher will escort the participant to the nearest mental health provider. Once the debrief is complete, participants will be compensated and thanked for their participation.

Ethics

As with any study, it is imperative to consider the risk and benefits of the current study to ensure that one is conducting an ethically driven study, and that the risks for the participants do not exceed the benefits of the results. The proposed study seeks to examine how a sense of community influence Latinas and their thriving in college. Because a lot of the literature focuses on what impairs marginalized students in higher education, one of the benefits of this study is that it focuses on what factors actually help students as they deal with their unique stressors. Plus, the knowledge gained from this study can help educators, those who want to fight educational inequity, and marginalized students to be able to advocate for resources to help them thrive in college.

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The proposed study is expected to have minimal risk on participants. The participants will be college students who are at least 18 years of age, are capable of consenting to participating, and they will be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any point in time. Apart from the informed consent, the debriefing process will also help protect participants, because the study has a slight increased risk due to deception. In the study, there will be confederates who will make a bigoted and ignorant comment geared towards the Latinx community, and participants will be deceived into believing that they overheard a natural and real comment, when it is not. There will also be a confederate who will act as either a support to process the comment, or they will have a separate and unrelated conversation, but the participant will think the confederate is another participant. The deception of the ignorant comment is necessary because according to the model being tested, there needs to be some kind of adversity to test how their sense of community following the event can influence their thriving. Therefore, the experiment creates “adversity.” The fellow confederate is necessary in the deception so that the participant either has the chance to process with a “community” or not, which is the experimental manipulation. The debriefing process is incredibly important because it will be the opportunity to inform participants that they were deceived. It will inform participants that the confederates do not believe the ignorant comment they made, and that it was all a set up. The debriefing process will also work to restore the emotional state of participants by asking them to think about an experience where they felt supported or happy. Participants, and their emotional state, will be assessed after the reflection. If their emotional state is not restored, the researcher will offer to escort the participant to whichever mental health resource they feel most comfortable reaching out to, and researchers will take all the steps necessary to make sure participants are emotionally ready to leave the lab, along with their payment.

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Besides the deception, which participants will have the opportunity to process with a researcher, the rest of the study is below the level of minimal risk, especially because it does not ask for any sensitive information and the participants are participating voluntarily. They will sign up of their own accord and can back out at any point. While participation is known to the researcher and the confederates, responses on the dependent measures will be anonymous. Furthermore, conversations had between participants and confederates will not be recorded. Participant responses will not be attached to their name, and any personal information given will be kept confidential in a locked database. Every precaution will be taken to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and care of participants during and after the study. Because the participants are not a protected population, and there is minimal risk in the procedure, the benefits definitely outweigh the risk.

Results

Before the main analyses are conducted, the data will be analyzed to check for outliers and normality and appropriate transformations will be made when necessary. To test the manipulation, a two-way ANOVA will be conducted to test for mean differences in the sense of community with the confederate. The predicted result is that the mean for the validation (support offered) conditions will be higher than the mean for the no validation (no support offered) condition, thus confirming that the manipulation is successful. Furthermore, while this prediction is exploratory, there may be a difference between validation with the Latina confederate and validation with the White confederate. In checking that the racial manipulation was successful, the data will be checked to confirm that participants responded with the right race in their

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condition. The participants who do not correctly identify the race of the confederate will be removed from the analyses and data set.

In order to test Hypotheses 1 through 3, a two-way ANOVA test will be conducted in order to test for mean differences in thriving based on the independent variables, the race of the confederate and support offered from the confederate. The predicted results are that there will be a main effect of validation on thriving. In other words, those in the thriving condition, regardless of the race of their confederate, will have stronger sense of thriving. The rationale behind the predicted results is that research shows that having an availability of support is correlated to lower levels of stress (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983), so it can be inferred that having support helps maintain one's well-being. It is expected that having an increased sense of community, hence support, will also mean having an increase sense of thriving.

The predicted results will also show a main effect of sense of membership on thriving. That is to say that those in the Latina condition, regardless of the support offered, will have a stronger sense of thriving than those in the White condition. The rationale behind this prediction is that part of the definition of community that Chavis et al. (1986) propose includes having sense of membership. Being in the condition with the Latina gives participants a sense of membership and belonging because they both come from the same ethnicity or race. Therefore, there is an underlying sense of solidarity because it is understood that the confederate can more easily understand the participant's experience.

The two-way ANOVA is also predicted to reveal an interaction between the effect of the race of the confederate and the effect of the support offered on thriving, confirming hypothesis 3, such that the effect of the validation depends on whether or not the confederate was Latina or White. The effect of validation is expected to be greater in the Latina condition than in the White

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condition. The definition of community for this study is defined as having a sense of membership and validation, and those in the supportive Latina condition are in the only condition in which they experience both components of community. Therefore, because the participants in this cell experience the full effects of having a sense of community, it is expected that they will have stronger sense of thriving.

To test the final hypothesis and compare the two means of two dependent groups, a dependent samples *t*-test will be conducted to see whether or not there is a significant difference in sense of community with Latina students compared to Latinx students. Sense of community with Latina students will be higher than sense of community with Latinx students consistent with Chavis et al.'s definition of sense of membership. Thinking of community through an intersectional lens, it is expected that there will be a sense of membership with Latinx students, but because Latinas share a share of membership in two different identifies, it would seem to follow that sharing the same gender and ethnicity would give participants more sense of membership. And if those people validate you, then it is expected to increase your sense of community. Specifically, there will be an increased sense of membership and sense of belonging with a community who not only shares the same racial or ethnic identity, but also shares the same gender identity. All to say, that Latinas can thrive better when they have a community of other Latinas to support them.

Discussion

The expected results of the proposed study are that community support from peers will moderate the relationship between adversity and thriving in Latinas in college. Community support will buffer the negative effects of the adversity Latinas face and help them thrive in

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college. The result would suggest that similar to the interdependent and collectivist support that Latinas receive from their families before college, Latinas need peer support to be able to thrive, specifically in self-acceptance, personal growth, and autonomy. Peer support replaces family support to an extent, and it may be because not only do other Latinas share similar cultural values and experiences, but they also can relate to the experiences of being a college student on the same campus. Looking at the predicted differences between conditions, specifically the main effect of having a Latina confederate and a White confederate, this notion of sharing cultural values and experiences explains why participants will likely have a greater sense of community and thriving with other Latinas than White confederates. Given that most institutions in the United States are predominantly White institutions, Latinas lack representation at their schools, so fostering solidarity between the small population of Latinas that are in higher education makes sharing experiences with each other much more meaningful.

The predicted result that there is no significant difference between the sense of community and thriving for those in the condition with the supportive White confederate and the non-supportive Latina confederate works to demonstrate that both sense of membership and validation uniquely contribute to sense of community. In the condition with a supportive White confederate, there is validation and sympathy present because the confederate and the participant discuss the significance of the adversity experienced, but because of the fact that the confederate is White, and representing those who are privileged, there lacks a sense of membership. On the other hand, in the condition where the confederate is Latina, but they do not discuss or process the adversity, a sense of membership is there because both come from a similar racial or ethnic background, and there may an unspoken level of solidarity and understanding, but the validation is missing because they do not talk about it explicitly.

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While sense of membership and validation are predicted to individually buffer the negative effects of thriving to an extent, the combination of the two more robustly characterizes community and are expected to be the ideal combination to predict thriving. Thus, that is why the condition of having a non-supportive White confederate is predicted to result in having a sense of community, and thus a sense of thriving, that is significantly lower than conditions that have one or both components of community. Unfortunately, this snapshot of having an unsupportive White peer is not totally uncommon in the college experience at PWI's for Latinas, explaining the toll that race-related stress has on the well-being and achievement of participants (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Crockett et al., 2007). That is why it is incredibly important to give Latinas access and resources that will actually support them to be able to thrive.

The goal for Latinas in college should be for them to thrive, not just survive, and the implications of the results would be that Latinas need to be given the resources, funds, and guidance to be able to build that community. That means college institutions and administrations need to dedicate time and money into supporting Latinas, and not just in their academics. Much of the past literature measures success or thriving by measuring academic achievement (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013). However, there was the conscious decision to avoid academic achievement as a variable in this study, and to instead focus on the mental health and well-being of Latinas because (1) college is more than just about exploring classes and homework, it is about the holistic experience of the students, (2) it is the responsibility of students to care for themselves and each in all forms of well-being and for administrations to prioritize and foster that mentality, and (3) it is important to attempt to break down the stigma around mental health issues, especially in the Latinx community. Therefore, the implications of the proposed study are action. It is necessary for colleges to help Latinas find their community

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on campus by offering multiple groups, but also supporting those students to be in community, encouraging them to take up space, and funding them to be able to continue fostering the community. It is easy for colleges to focus on building community around the identity of being students or members of that institutions, but that college community erases any background or intersectional identity of students who are not properly represented. The implications of the predicted results work to emphasize the importance of representation, because without Latina students, or Latina staff, or Latina mental health care providers, the spaces that could be potential spaces of community lack a sense of membership for those Latinas seeking community, making it more difficult for them to thrive. However, the proposed study also works to show that simply having a larger number of Latinas on campus is not enough. There needs to be explicit work to allow Latina students to connect with each other and feel supported. Institutions need to legitimize being in community as a form of self-care, and fund these opportunities for Latinas to take care of themselves and their mental health, because the institution needs to validate this need for support and validate the experiences and perspectives of their marginalized students and communities.

While the proposed study fills a need and provides answers as to where colleges can improve their inclusivity of underrepresented communities, there are a few limitations that future studies can address. For example, this study provides a very small snapshot of the experiences that Latinas go through in their college career. The brief interaction between participants and confederates in no way represents the spectrum of support or students they will interact with in college. Therefore, future studies can investigate the influence of community support and thriving over a longer period of time, and could perhaps study how these two variables change from first year to senior year. Another limitation is that the adversity faced in the experiment is

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not organic and is only a very specific type of adversity. That again, does not represent the spectrum of adversity that Latinas can face. The adverse comment made is a more overt example of racism and prejudice. However, microaggressions and other forms of ignorance, which may be harder to spot, can be just as pervasive. Finally, another limitation to the proposed study is that the definitions of thriving and sense of community are limited due to the design of the experiment. Even just looking at Ryff's dimensions of thriving (1989), not all dimensions were included because the design and purpose of the study was to predict thriving after adversity, whereas many of Ryff's measurements involved experiences and well-being from the past. And for sense of community, Chavis et al.'s four dimensions of the Sense of Community Index could not be affected by the brief interaction between the confederate and the participant. There would need to be a much more realistic and developed relationship to measure sense of community using Chavis et al.'s entire definition. However, the current design does not allow for that time or development. Despite the limitation presented, there is still merit to the proposed study, and future studies can work in addressing its flaws in the design or definition of variables.

The results of the proposed study are a stepping stone for future research in literature around higher education, particularly surround students of color. The predicted results may present a similar pattern in other marginalized communities, and studies should examine if community support also buffers the negative effects of adversity in other populations such as Black students, Asian-American/Pacific Islander students, Indigenous students, first generation students, or any other marginalized intersecting identities. One hope for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal study what investigates differences in the attitudes about having a Latina community in college students. Researchers could study what thoughts older Latina students have about giving back to the community to help it and its member thrive. Also, future

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research can investigate what needs specific populations have when intersecting race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, generational status, citizenship, and more. Future research can also investigate which factors of community influence thriving more than sense of membership and validation. Because there is little literature surrounding the thriving of Latinas in college, and other marginalized populations as well, there are many directions and topics that need to be investigated. This proposed study is meant to begin the exploration of how to support Latinas to thrive and graduate from college while supporting their mental health.

Investigating the role of community in Latinas in college is incredibly important because they are currently being under-served and under-supported. The systematic disadvantages Latinas face in getting their degrees should not be confused with notions of incapability or lack of desire. The lack of resources for Latinas needs to be met with action, especially because Latinx enrollment in college is on the rise, and colleges and universities cannot continue neglecting the needs of their students of color. A Bachelor's degree is becoming increasingly necessary to work towards social and economic mobility, and if institutions are not held accountable, Latinas will continue to be systematically deprived of their right to an equitable education. This study provides an answer as to how to begin better supporting Latinas through community, and it is imperative to continue researching and reflecting on how to serve marginalized communities as a form of activism and advocacy.

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