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### Title

Understanding Latino Male Undergraduate Experiences in Higher Education

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3r00k524>

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### Publication Date

2004-05-01

## Understanding Latino Male Undergraduate Experiences in Higher Education

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There is a widening gender gap between Latinos and Latinas with respect to higher education participation. It is difficult to explain why Latinos participate at a lower rate or why Latinas participate at a higher rate. Sadly, outside of the literature on gang involvement and incarceration, knowledge on the education and schooling experiences of Latino males remains relatively scarce.

This ethnographic research highlighted the schooling experiences of three Chicano male undergraduates (Antonio, Adrian, and Ernesto) during their last year attending West Coast University (pseudonym). More specifically, this research highlighted the kinds of challenges, or what is referred to as disconnects of understanding, that confront even the most academically successful students. While Antonio, Ernesto and Adrian's eligibility and academic backgrounds were strong enough to be offered admissions at West Coast University, their academic practices to attain academic success (working hard, completing homework, and studying) were actually misaligned with their realities at West Coast University. In essence, utilizing local funds of knowledge (college preparation programs in high school and community college) as a universal template to inform their approach to attain academic success at West Coast worked in their disfavor. There were clear disconnects that initially threatened their academic performance.

Ernesto, Adrian, and Antonio figured out how to academically succeed in higher education through *social responsive networks*. These networks were designed and orchestrated by these three students to help them resolve their particular and varied needs. In the end, these networks enabled these students to persevere and graduate in spite of feeling lost, unwelcome, and having to make decision that exceeded their college expectations. These networks enabled these

men to figure out how to mediate and curtail the exclusionary treatment that resulted from being perceived as outsiders by the two predominantly represented student groups (Whites and Asian Americans).

Academic performance is more complex and requires collaboration across contexts to include and incorporate multiple partnerships. The findings of this study offer some important considerations for policy.

- 1) ***Retention efforts need to be tailored individually for students on a yearly basis until graduation, addressing the kinds of options and decisions needed to insure they obtain their educational and professional goals;***
- 2) ***Future research must continue to understand the relationship between student perceptions and the presence or absence of opportunity structures within the institution;***
- 3) ***Institutions must take greater measures to decrease exclusionary practice by faculty and other students on campus to ensure that all students have access to resources and opportunities;***
- 4) ***Educational policies need to deliberately support stronger partnerships to bridge outreach and retention offices and respective efforts so students gain a localized, social understanding about how to academically participate.***

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