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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THRIVING IN LATINA/O UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS IN THE U.S.

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Abstract
Thriving, the phenomenon of going through an adversity and emerging "better off," has been relatively understudied in the field of psychology. Closely related to, but distinct from resilience, in which individuals overcome an adversity and return to normal development (Garmezy, 1993), thriving has not been explored in-depth and in particular, understudied with Latino/a college students. Latino/a college students stand to benefit from exploring strengths that contribute to their ability to thrive given the number and magnitude of adversities they often face. The current study investigated thriving in Latino/a undergraduate students. Analysis of qualitative interviews through Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR; Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997) revealed adversities experienced (e.g., family discord and cultural difficulties), methods of thriving (e.g., cognitive coping, cultural values, faith, resources, social support and perseverance), and gains from the experience (e.g., improved self-concept, improved relationships, and increased knowledge base). Implications, limitations, and future directions are discussed.
Key Words: Resilience, Latino/a Psychology, Undergraduate Students, Consensual Qualitative Research

Un estudio exploratorio sobre el prosperar en estudiantes de licenciatura Latina/os en los Estados Unidos
Resume
Prosperar, el fenómeno de pasar por una adversidad y salir "mejor" ha sido relativamente poco estudiado en el campo de la psicología. En relación cercana con, pero distinta de la resiliencia, que es cuando las personas superan una adversidad y vuelven al desarrollo normal (Garmezy, 1993), la prosperidad no ha sido explorada en profundidad y, en particular, ha sido poco estudiada en los/as estudiantes universitarios/as Latino/as. Los/as estudiantes Latino/as pueden beneficiarse de la exploración de las fortalezas que contribuyen a su capacidad de prosperar teniendo en cuenta el número y la magnitud de las adversidades con las que a menudo se enfrentan. El presente estudio investigó el prosperar en estudiantes Latino/as de pregrado. El análisis de las entrevistas cualitativas a través de la Investigación Cualitativa Consensuada (CQR; Hill, Thompson y Williams, 1997) reveló adversidades (por ejemplo, la discordia familiar y las dificultades culturales), los métodos utilizados para prosperar (por ejemplo, afrontamiento cognitivo, los valores culturales, de la fe, los recursos, el apoyo social y la perseverancia), y las ganancias de la experiencia (por ejemplo, la mejora de la autoestima, la mejora en las relaciones, y una mayor base de conocimientos). Se identifican las implicaciones de los resultados, las limitaciones del estudio y las posibles direcciones futuras.
Palabras Clavas: resiliencia, psicología de los/as Latino/as, estudiantes de pregrado, Investigación Cualitativa Consensuada

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Latinas/os[2] are the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008), accounting for more than half of the U.S. population growth in the most recent census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Despite the dramatic growth of this population, Latinas/os continue to be underrepresented in the educational system (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Statistics indicate that one out of every two Latina/o students will not graduate from high school (Roach, 2004), with less than a third attending college and fewer than 7% obtaining a degree (Fry, 2002). Furthermore, studies demonstrate that Latina/o undergraduates struggle with college progression and persistence (Kaufman, Matlock, & Franco, 2001). While college can be a difficult time for many students, Latina/o students often encounter additional and unique stressors that can impact adjustment (Quintana, Vogel, & Ybarra, 1991), such as being the first generation to attend the university (Rodriguez, 1996; Strage, 2000; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003), socioeconomic concerns, and conflict between traditional values of helping family and having time for studies (Castillo & Hill, 2004). Low levels of college adjustment under such circumstances have been linked to poor academic performance, increased likelihood of seeking services from a campus psychological services center, substantially higher rates of withdrawal from college, reduced likelihood to graduate on time, and less overall satisfaction within the college experience (Baker & Schultz, 1992).

Nevertheless, many Latina/o students successfully adjust to and complete college (Gandara, 1982). Several factors have been identified as correlates to this achievement, including a strong ethnic identity, self-esteem, ability to navigate within the dominant culture, and parental attachment (Yazedjian & Toews, 2008). Cultural values have also been highlighted as potential aids in educational attainment. For example, strong ties to family has been shown to be a salient cultural value for many Latina/o students (Phinney et al., 2000), while a high valuing of family obligations has been related to high educational motivation among college students from diverse backgrounds (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002).

A factor that may be linked to the adjustment and achievement of Latina/o college students is thriving. Thriving denotes an individual's ability to succeed after experiencing adversity and has been conceptualized as a process in which "…the experience of adversity promotes the emergence of a quality that makes the person better off afterward than beforehand" (Carver, 1998, p.247). General psychological thriving is still a relatively understudied construct in the literature and warrants further investigation, particularly in the Latino/a population. Specifically, understanding what allows an individual to not only "survive" or "continue to develop" but to actually grow in the face of adversity, could allow us to nurture such aspects in college students and other individuals facing hardship, thus tailoring prevention and other intervention efforts. Thriving can be differentiated from the related construct of resilience in that resilience is defined by a return to normal development (Garmezy, 1993; Rutter, 1987) whereas thriving denotes being better off after adversity (Carver, 1998). The two constructs have been found to be related but to have some differential predictors in Latino/a populations (Morgan Consoli et al., 2012; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013).

In this study we explored thriving in self-identified, Latina/o college students. Through interviewing these students we hoped to gain a better understanding of the factors that contributed to them being able to overcome difficulties that they had faced, as well as their feeling of being "better off" as a result of the adversity. Adversities were self-defined as different individuals have different perceptions of hardship based on their own contextual backgrounds (Blankenship, 1998). The project received approval by the university Institutional Review Board.

Thriving as a Process

Thriving has been described as a *process* rather than an individual trait or variable (Saakvitne, Tennen, & Ameck, 1998) and has been related to several specific, positive abilities or behaviors. For example, thriving has been related to the ability to find meaning in adversity (Parry & Chesler, 2005), and has been associated with caring for one's community, academic success, recognition of diversity, and healthy lifestyles (Benson & Scales, 2009). Studies have shown that an individual may be thriving in one area, while not doing well in another area and that not all paths to thriving look the same (Benson & Scales, 2009) Therefore, not all individuals who confront similar adversities will use similar resources or skills to overcome them, nor will they experience the same growth after the adversity, although it is still unclear why this is so.

Thriving in Latino/as

Latinas/os in the U.S. face many challenges, including discrimination (Finch, Hummer, Kolody, & Vega, 2001), prejudice (Araujo & Borrell, 2006),

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[2] It is important to note that the term "Latino/a" refers to a wide range of people from different countries and cultures. For the purposes of this article, this term will be used for people who self-identified as "Latino/a."

acculturative tress (Finch & Vega, 2003), and markedly limited access to healthcare (Heyman, Nuñez, & Talavera, 2009). Additionally, approximately 25% of Latina/o children live below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Nevertheless, Latinas/os have reported a high level of perceived life satisfaction, (Parra-Cardona, Bulock, Imig, Villaruel, & Gold, 2006), mental health (Alegria et al., 2008) and support networks (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010).

There has been relatively little exploration of the construct of thriving within Latina/o populations. One study found that thriving is related to hope and perspective in Latinas suffering from chronic illness (Abraido-Lanza, Guier, & Colon, 1998). Additionally, qualitative themes such as family support, religious beliefs, and positive thinking have been described as methods of thriving and resilience used by Latina/o adult community members (Morgan Consoli et al. , 2012). Much more research is needed to fully flesh out this construct.

Methods

Researchers

The research team consisted of five female researchers: a Mixed Identity (Mexican/European) Counseling Psychology faculty member; three doctoral students in Counseling Psychology (two identifying as Mexican American and one as Salvadoran American); and one undergraduate student who identified as Mexican American. Their research interests included resilience and thriving in the Latino/a population and social justice issues. Congruent with qualitative research standards, it is necessary to acknowledge one's "biases" and expectations prior to conducting the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In a preliminary discussion among analysis team members, it was determined that all team members went into the study with beliefs that everyone has a potential for thriving, but circumstances either permit or do not permit its emergence in one's life.

Participants

Participants were recruited from undergraduate applied psychology courses at a large public university on the West coast. Interested students were invited to participate in an interview if they met the following criteria: a) self-identified as a 1st, 2nd or 3rd generation Latina/o (defined as having immigrated to the U.S. oneself, having parents who immigrated to the U.S., or having grandparents who immigrated to the U.S., respectively), b) identified as having faced a (self-defined by participant) adversity, and c) felt they were "better off" after the adversity. The condition of being "better off" was defined and

determined by the participant. The researchers decided to use this as a criterion to capture the subjectivity of such a condition. For example, one person may feel better off if they re-enroll in school, while another may feel better off deciding to take a break from coursework. As the study was exploratory, it seemed important to allow descriptions of the range of such nuanced determinations. A total of 7 (5 female, 2 male) students met study criteria and agreed to participate in a one-on-one interview to further discuss their experiences. In general, qualitative research samples are small in order to be able to gain an in-depth understanding of each participant (CQR; Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997), and the current sample was within the guidelines on qualitative sample size. One participant was a sophomore (2nd generation female), three participants were juniors (one 3rd generation male, two 2nd generation females), and three participants were seniors (one 3rd generation male, one 1st generation female and one 2nd generation female). The sample was collected purposefully, in other words, participants who had specifically experienced the phenomenon under study were chosen as participants. Such a sample facilitates in-depth exploration of a phenomenon as emergent themes from qualitative studies are intended to explore deeper level constructs about which little is known, rather than be generalizable (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

Procedures

Members of the research team individually interviewed eligible, consenting participants. The semi-structured interviews consisted of four main questions with follow-up prompts as necessary (see Appendix). Each interview lasted approximately one to one and a half hours and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. Interview questions focused on the adversities that the individual had faced, how they overcame this adversity, and how they felt they were better off after the event. Notes were kept on any nonverbal behaviors observed.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were uploaded into NVIVO qualitative analysis software and CQR methodology was used to analyze the data. This methodology has been suggested to be particularly effective for exploration of little-studied constructs (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997). Such qualitative methodology has also been suggested as appropriate for studying ethnic minority or other disenfranchised groups (Morrow, 2007), such as Latino/as in the U.S.. The analysis process consisted of two research teams of three members each analyzing the data. Analysts

had all undergone training in CQR, as well as read articles on CQR and discussed in a team format. Three of the members had previously served as analysts on CQR data analysis teams for other projects. The student researchers were divided into two teams of three, with the faculty member, who had several years of experience in qualitative analysis and experience teaching courses in qualitative methodology, serving as an internal auditor. The internal auditor was present during the analysis process of both teams to offer guidance, ensure that members remained focused on the data (rather than speculating about meaning), and facilitate equal participation, as per CQR guidelines (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). The interviews were divided between the two teams for analysis.

Members of each research team independently identified and defined major data domains (used to cluster similar data) then met to discuss these domains until they reached consensus on which domains best captured the participants' answers. Next, analysts independently developed core ideas (summary of content for a specific case) across domains and then met to discuss until consensus was reached. Finally, categories, subcategories, and in some cases tertiary categories were developed and defined based on the core ideas using the same process. Data was analyzed iteratively, revisiting the data and adapting the coding scheme throughout the analysis process. Halfway through the analysis, the two teams compared their coding schemas developed thus far and discussed until agreement was reached on categorization of all data. The comparison process and discussion until agreement was repeated after all interviews had been analyzed to ensure consistency of coding. Analysis was deemed complete when no more new categories emerged from the data. Process notes were also taken to record decisions that were made during coding and the reasoning behind these decisions for later reflection. A Caucasian female psychologist with several years of experience in multicultural studies/practice and qualitative analysis served as an external auditor (person familiar with CQR methodology but not necessarily expert in the construct under study) and made suggestions for clarification and revision of domains and core ideas, which were discussed with the research team and incorporated into the final coding scheme (see Table 1). Trustworthiness was achieved though constant dialog until agreement on all steps of data analysis, use of process notes for reflection on past decisions, and presence of both internal and external auditors.

Table 1
Latina/o students' methods of thriving and gains

Frequency/ #	Illustrative Core Idea(s)
Variant/ 3	Participant had a family member who was ill
Variant/ 3	Participant lost a family member; Participant lost his job
Variant/ 2	Participant discovered she was pregnant
Variant/ 2	Participant had difficulty communicating in Spanish with family and friends
Variant/ 3	Participant had difficulty leaving her family for college because "family comes first"
Typical/5	Participant described a lack of support by others as a minority in college
Variant/ 2	Participant was depressed
Variant/ 2	Participant was unable to see the good in situations
Typical/4	Participant had to deal with legal issues
Variant/ 2	Participant engaged in other activities to distract from adversity
Variant/ 2	Participant adjusted to not being able to socialize in order to focus on school
General/ 6	Participant focused on how her hard work in school would help her care for her child in the future
Typical/4	Participant was able to connect with others by being able to speak Spanish
Variant/ 3	Participant had a perspective change due to near death of her sister

Typical/4	Participant wanted to give something back to her parents
Typical/5	Participant wanted to become a social worker
Variant/ 3	Participant did not wish to end up in jail like other family members
Variant/ 3	Participant wanted to set a good example for siblings
Typical/4	Participant prayed for help
Typical/4	PUENTE program was helpful
General/ 7	Participant built networks with other Latina/os
Variant/ 3	Participant viewed being independent as beneficial
Variant/ 3	Participant continued to "keep going" despite adversity
Typical/5	The birth of a child gave new identity
Typical/4	The difficulty brought everyone together
General/ 7	Participant gained a new perspective on the struggles of the Latina/o community
Typical/5	Participant began to appreciate professions that aid individuals with disabilities
General/ 6	Participant gained realization of harshness of life
Variant/ 2	Participant grew to appreciate Chicano/a culture and began to take courses to learn more about the culture
Typical/5	Participant recognized a desire to help others going through her adversity
Typical/4	Participant became more clear on what to do with the rest of his life

Results

The three domains derived through team consensus included: Adversities, Methods of Overcoming, and Gains. Emergent categories were classified according to the labels suggested by CQR methodology: categories that applied to all (N=7) or to all but one of the participants were labeled *General*, categories that applied to more than half of the events up to the cutoff for general were labeled *Typical*, and categories that applied to at least two cases up to the cutoff for typical were labeled *Variant* (see Table 1). In the section below, domains, categories, and definitions as well as examples are reported.

Domain 1: Adversity

An adversity was defined as the event or experience that participants overcame and, as a result, were "better off." What was considered an adversity was self-defined by participants. Adversities discussed by participants ranged from individual circumstances to general, societal situations.

Family discord. Several participants discussed coping with adversities involving trouble in their families, specifically family illness (variant), loss, (variant) and unexpected pregnancy (variant). For example, one second-generation participant stated:

> She (sister) was born with severe cerebral palsy, so she is in a wheelchair and she is very much handicapped. My mom basically takes care of her completely. She feeds her, changes her, does everything. So that has been pretty much the struggle I have gone through my entire life is dealing with that as part of my life…it just came with a lot of other stuff like problems.

The participant indicated that her greatest struggle was consistently worrying about her sister's physical well-being as there were multiple hospitalizations due to her health condition.

Another first generation participant discussed her unplanned pregnancy as the adversity that she had to overcome: "…especially when I was pregnant, I was falling into the statistic of the immigrant and the pregnant, it was really hard." For this participant, it was difficult to cope with her conflicted feelings as she was raised in a family that promoted and encouraged further education and a professional career. The participant was afraid that individuals belonging to the dominant group would stereotype her as "an uneducated Latina immigrant" receiving federal public services and aid.

Some participants described some type of loss as the adversity that they had to overcome. Typically, this took the form of losing a family member. For example, a third generation, male student stated, "My grandpa passed away… was pretty tough I didn't really realize the extent of everything when it was happening, until after he died it hit me." For this student, the loss was magnified as he wanted his grandfather to accept medical treatment and felt emotionally conflicted after his grandfather refused treatment for his illness.

Cultural difficulties. Several difficulties were discussed which pertained to aspects of the native or host culture or the conflict between them: language and cultural values (variant). Language was defined as a barrier to communicating with family and was exemplified by the following participant description: "It's especially hard on third generations, all my cousins, we don't know Spanish…as they got

older they lost it so now its hard for us to communicate with our grandparents." Participants also described feeling conflicted with leaving home to go away to college because they were raised with strong family interdependence values, including the cultural belief that adult children live at home until they get married.

Lack of socio-emotional support. This typical response by the participants entailed feeling isolated, misunderstood, and having no one to talk to in a time of need. Many of these experiences were related to being perceived as a minority. One second-generation student exemplified this when she stated, "Being like a Latino here, like you're a minority you don't have a lot of support In high school I was the majority, I was in a full Latino and Black school and so when I came to this university I became the minority because it was only twelve, thirteen percent (Latina/o student population)." Participants described experiencing this lack of socio-emotional support from family (parental & extended), friends/peers, and high school teachers and staff.

Legal issues (typical response). Participants also discussed having to overcome difficulties related to legal documentation and citizenship. One first-generation participant reported how time consuming and difficult it was to obtain immigration documentation: "Waking up at four in the morning, stand in line, and if you get in, you get in, and if not, you go home. So it was really bad."

Domain Two: Method of Overcoming

Method of Overcoming was defined as the mechanism, or mechanisms, that assisted participants in overcoming an adversity. Emergent Methods of Overcoming included seven variant responses: Activity Involvement, Adaptation, Insight, Avoidant Goals, Role Modeling, Independence, and Perseverance. Typical responses included Cultural Values, Making Parents Proud, Faith, and Resources. There were two general responses of Cognitive Coping and Social Support. These categories are outlined in this section.

Activity involvement. Participation in sports, music, exercise, community events, and keeping busy with daily routines were reported as ways to cope with adversity. The second-generation participant, who had experienced the adversity of living with a sister who suffered from a serious illness, reported becoming involved in a project which was informed by her own experience, "I organized my own sibling (of children with serious illness) workshop for the younger kids…it was just a lot of fun." The participant had attended several peer-support groups offered by the hospital, however, she reported that the experience of forming and

developing her own group was more helpful in helping her to overcome many of her challenges. For other participants as well, being involved in extracurricular activities helped them to distract themselves from their problems, have a sense of "doing something, " learn how to relax, and release their frustrations.

Adaptation. Another method of thriving employed by students, Adaptation was defined as a process in which participants demonstrated the flexibility to acclimatize to a new or difficult environment For example, in discussing adaptation to negotiating the multiple roles of being a college student and a young mother as the result of unplanned pregnancy, a second-generation student stated, "It became a habit after a while…I didn't really mind like not sleeping or I didn't really mind like not being able to go out with my friends."

Cognitive coping. Most participants described utilizing mental actions such as normalizing or positive reframing to deal with situations. For example, a second-generation participant reported, "I was able to overcome just being really sad and upset when I was able to see it as something that made me stronger and shaped me into a better individual." The process of reframing thoughts about the current challenge, for this participant, served as a method to not only cope with the circumstance, but more specifically served as a form of empowerment to help her excel and overcome negative emotions.

Cultural values. Participants indicated relying on values and practices that involved utilizing aspects of their culture to help overcome adversity. For example, a second-generation participant stated,

"…So I was able to talk to the other kids in Spanish and all of that, so that was pretty cool. So not only do we have siblings with disabilities but we both speak Spanish and we both have Hispanic parents so it was a nice way to connect with other people…"

Insight. Insight was defined as the process of gaining a deeper intuitive understanding of a situation. A second-generation, female student explained that while accompanying her sister through a grave illness in which death became imminent, "All of the resentment and anger that I felt previously it just all went out the window and I realized …that I really loved my sister." By gaining this insight, the participant was able to develop a deeper understanding of her sister's illness and use it to form a stronger and healthier relationship.

Motivation. This emergent theme was defined as the driving force that influenced thriving behaviors and thoughts. Subcategories of Making

Parents Proud, (Typical response), Approach Goals (Typical response) Avoidant Goals (Variant response) and Role Modeling (Variant response) emerged. For example, a second- generation student reported, "I think I just had to prove them (parents), prove to them that I wasn't going to let this stop me." Another, first-generation, participant stated, "I do want to be better, I do want to go off to college, I do want to make my parents proud." This participant also mentioned wanting to stay out of prison, "I didn't want to be like my cousins, all my cousins are in jail so… I'm the second in my generation to go to college." Participants also described being motivated to serve as a role model for others; a second-generation student stated, "… it's for my little brother or my little sister, I want them to have a good role model."

Faith. A method of overcoming adversity reported by most participants was relying on spiritual beliefs to help them get through their problems. A second generation participant reported, "…[I] can still talk to Him and pray to Him too, he still allows me to have that relationship with Him [God] (despite the adversity)" Other participants talked about praying, going to church, and believing in the power and influence of a higher being to help them in times of trouble.

External Resources. Defined as participants utilizing outside help, such as seeking additional school or community services or programs, one participant described her experience in an academic preparation program that aims to increase the rate of students from historically underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds enrolling in four-year universities, as "very helpful" in helping her to overcome her adversity.

Social Support. This category was defined as physical and emotional comfort from others. A second-generation student noted, "… I guess just by building networks, especially among Latinas, you just have that support group right there. I feel like my friends got me through a lot here." Participants described receiving such social support from the community, mentors, their families, and/or their schools.

Perseverance. Other participants noted continuing to strive and move forward in spite of difficulties. A second-generation participant, detailing how she was able to continue despite difficulty stated, "It seems like just to not regret anything... to just try it. And if you fail then you failed. You keep going."

Domain Three: Gains

The researchers defined a Gain as an attribute, characteristic, or relationship that the participant gained post-adversity (i.e., *how* the participant was "better off"). This domain included one variant response (Increased Appreciation for Culture), five typical responses (Improved Self-Concept, Improved Relationships, Awareness, Helping Others, and Aspirations), and two General Responses (Increased Knowledge Base and Maturity). **Improved self-concept.** Participants highlighted experiencing an improved self-concept or a healthier, integrated view of oneself, which included a sense of empowerment. For example, a first-generation participant described getting this through her new child. She stated, "I think (participant's child's name) gave us that room to grow and learn for ourselves and from our mistakes and not blaming other people."

Improved relationships. Another post-adversity outcome entailed participants developing healthier interpersonal relations. A second-generation participant reported, "…when this happened (her father passing away) it pretty much brought everyone together and so that was just really comforting to know that."

Increased knowledge base. All participants discussed learning something from their adversity by learning new information and tools. A first-generation participant noted, "…It (the adversity) opened up a whole perspective of my community of Latinos and how much struggle…how much people have gone through the same thing." The second-generation participant dealing with her sister's chronic disability described increased awareness of issues relating to her sister's medical condition, "I do have a lot more respect for people who work with people with disabilities. And I feel I wouldn't have been awakened, woken to that appreciation if it hadn't been for my sister."

Increased appreciation for culture. A few participants gained more desire to learn about their culture after experiencing the adversity. For example, a third-generation student reported, "…I grew to appreciate my culture…I started taking Chicano Studies. I wanted to learn more about my culture. I even started speaking Spanish."

Helping others. Several participants reported experiencing a desire to help others as result of overcoming the adversity. This was defined as taking the initiative to help others in need. A second-generation student stated, "I didn't really have that person to share the (adverse) experience with, but it feels good knowing that I could be there for anyone else if they need it." Many participants reported the desire to give back and help individuals who have experienced similar challenges to what they had faced. In particular, several participants expressed a

wish to help others by serving as a positive role model to underprivileged Latina/o youth.

Aspirations. A majority of the participants disclosed their aspirations and described them as having future hope and goals that were influenced by having experienced the adversity. For example, a second-generation participant stated, "…the experience has given me guidance to what I want to do with the rest of my life… I want to be involved in Social Work or maybe even School Psychology." The categories for Adversities, Methods of Thriving and Gains, their frequencies, and illustrative core ideas are outlined in Table 1.

Discussion

The current, exploratory study explored the experience of thriving in seven undergraduate students who identified as being Latina/o and who felt they had overcome an adversity and were better off afterwards. This study presents valuable, detailed accounts and analyses of what helps Latina/o college students to thrive, specifically with regards to the process as opposed to solely the outcomes. Several themes emerged which are consistent with previous literature and may be used to determine *how* to help Latina/o college students to overcome adversities.

Adversities were varied and individual, indicating that there were no singular, general, detrimental experiences experienced by our participants. This highlights the importance of individual exploration with Latino/a undergraduates as to what they are facing, what they perceive as adversity, and subsequently what may help them to overcome the problem.

Methods of Overcoming indicated several prevalent themes. Specifically, Social Support, by family, peers, and school personnel was discussed by all participants in this study as an aid for overcoming adversity. Social support has been found to be a consistent correlate of resilience, which shares some predictors with thriving, and lends support to this finding. In the Latina/o population, *familismo,* or the practice of placing value on "…attitudes, behaviors, and family structures operating within an extended family system…" (Coohey, 2001, p.130), in particular, has been found to be an important factor in promoting resilience and decreasing negative outcomes. Social support is an element of college students' lives that may be intentionally fostered through campus outreach programs, peer mentoring, and extra-curricular activities. It seems there may be value in Latina/o-specific cultural events for these students, as participants discussed Latina/o cultural values and practices, as well as connecting with other Latina/o individuals as helpful in overcoming adversities.

Discussion of Faith by participants is consistent with literature suggesting that individuals of certain religious groups, such as Latina/o Catholics, see their beliefs as a source of empowerment enabling them to successfully cope with adversities (Kane, 2010). While such religious or spiritual beliefs can be manifested in a plethora of ways, their presence has been found to be a contributor to resilience (Morgan, 2007; Gonzales, 2007) and to be positively correlated with good mental health (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). *Positive religious coping* is a term used to denote individuals turning to religion and becoming better able to deal with the idea of loss of control, viewing negative experiences from a "growth" point of view, and finding comfort in a higher being or life plan (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). There has also been some indication that religious faith may be a marker of thriving as opposed to resilience among Latinas/os (Morgan Consoli et al., unpublished manuscript). Therefore, results suggest that it might be important to help Latina/o undergraduates explore their spiritual or religious beliefs, or, more generally, to facilitate discussions of meaning-making.

The theme of Cognitive Coping was also illustrated by all but one participant. Such an adaptation of cognitions is supported by findings in the literature connecting the view of an adversity to opportunity for growth (Bekhet, Fouad, & Zauszniewski, 2011) and optimistically interpreting a negative event (Abramson, 2000). Additionally, positive thinking has been linked to reduced depression (Beck, 1987; Zauszniewski, McDonald, Krafcik & Chung, 2002). Participant responses indicate that it may be beneficial to instruct Latina/o undergraduates in reframing techniques when dealing with adversity. Outreach programs and peer mentors may also model such skills to help students be more successful in thriving during their college years.

Of particular interest were the findings related to cultural beliefs, identity, and practices that appear to empower individuals to better face adversity. Many participants discussed their positive feelings about being able to connect to others through speaking Spanish, or their sense of being Latina/o. Some literature has reflected that specific cultural values (e.g. *familismo*; Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007; *simpatía;* Gallo, Pinedo, Espinosa de los Monteros, & Arguelles, 2009) play a major role in Latina/o resilience. Studies also reveal greater well-being resulting from stronger Latino/a ethnic identification (French & Chavez, 2010). In the current study, participants generally reported on the benefit of being with others who shared their identity and/or of learning more about their culture. The

current findings seem most closely related to the construct of *Private Regard* described in the literature as "one's own affective and evaluative judgments of one's racial/ethnic group", the subcategory of ethnic identity described in the context of African-American racial identity development (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Resources for building this in Latina/o college students may include Latina/o clubs and social groups, multicultural events showcasing Latina/o arts and speakers, taking culture specific coursework, and engaging in service and volunteer activities with a Latina/o focus in the community.

In the area of Gains, we noted that participants overwhelmingly felt they gained knowledge and maturity from their adversities. Several also discussed improved self-concept and a desire to help others. This highlights the importance of helping Latino/a students to focus on lessons learned from their hardships and to use them as motivators for their next course of action. Participation in community activities and service and political advocacy may be worthwhile things to encourage in such students.

Overall, different adversities led to different gains that constituted thriving in these participants. Interestingly, despite the differences in these areas, the methods utilized to overcome the adversities were fairly consistent across situations. This leads us to believe that certain methods of thriving could be taught to Latina/o college students. This study also indicates that culture-specific values, such as use of *familismo*, religious beliefs, or fostering pride in one's ethnic identity may be particularly helpful for Latina/o individuals, which is consistent with previous findings (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013)

Implications for Practice

This study explored aspects of thriving among Latina/o college students, highlighting methods of thriving and the resulting gains after overcoming difficulties. Due to the difficulties Latina/o undergraduates often experience during college, it is important to understand how to help them successfully navigate these challenges. Ultimately, the ability to overcome and grow following adversity helps students to persist through college to degree attainment. Findings may therefore be especially important for college counselors working with Latina/o students, as students struggling with difficulties during college have been found more likely to utilize campus psychological services (Baker & Schultz, 1992). This research highlights the need to explore students' internal factors that facilitate coping and overcoming adversity. These internal processes include

examining the underlying motivations that guide a student's desire to overcome problems (Motivation), the student's own desire to persist and succeed (Perseverance), and students' overall ability to be self-sufficient and independent (Independence).

Connecting students to external resources is also important in the facilitation of thriving, including engaging students in activities (Activity Involvement), connecting students to important resources that can assist them with challenges in their lives (Resources), and building, enhancing, and utilizing student support networks (Social Support). Further areas to explore within college student counseling sessions may include teaching students new ways to cognitively reframe adversities (Cognitive Coping) and facilitating the examination of difficulties or challenges in new ways (Insight). Findings also highlight the importance of attending to culturally specific factors to better understand the role of cultural values in how a student views or solves a difficulty (Cultural Values).

Additionally, directly addressing how students may successfully adapt to changes can assist them in adjusting to new challenges (Adaptation). A unique aspect of the current findings that is often not directly addressed in counseling interventions is Faith in a higher being, which was identified by many students as a helpful factor in overcoming challenges. When working with Latina/o students struggling with various difficulties, it may thus be important to explore the role of faith and examine how this may assist in getting through difficulties for that individual.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the current study served to illuminate several key factors of Latina/o thriving, there were some limitations. First, the sample, while not meant to be generalizable, would have been richer had we been able to recruit a greater number of participants as well as more male participants. Similarly, despite sizable recruitment efforts, the bulk of our participants identified as second-generation Latinas/os in the U.S., thus limiting the picture of thriving across generations that we had hoped to explore. This is, however, representative of the university from which they were recruited. Future studies could include a broader range of participants.

An area for expansion would be to also interview Latina/o community members. It is quite likely that the adversity and thriving experiences of these individuals may differ from the experiences of college undergraduates. Finally, mixed methods research might be used to further explore this construct through the use of thriving and related measures, to allow for complementarity and triangulation between the qualitative and quantitative

data.. The creation of thriving scales for use with Latino/a college students is needed and could provide further information on correlates of thriving in this population.

Conclusion

The current study helps to address the need for research on culture specific aspects of thriving, in particular with Latina/o individuals, a rapidly growing sector of the U.S. population. Our data focus on the experiences of these students during the time in which they are navigating their college career. Some of our findings pertain to prior research on what facilitates resilience and thriving in Latina/os, whereas others suggest areas of expansion in the literature. This exploratory study provides a basis that may be expanded upon for further research in this area on how to best address the facilitation of thriving in the face of adversity for Latino/a college students.

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