

Role of Self-Efficacy, Stress, Social Integration, and Family Support in Latino College Student Persistence and Health

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This study tested a path model of Latino college student outcomes ($n = 179$). Four constructs were integrated into the model which predicted persistence intentions and health: self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), stress, family support, and social integration (Tinto, 1987). As hypothesized, college self-efficacy was associated directly with stronger persistence intentions and associated indirectly with better health. Contrary to expectations, self-efficacy associated directly with social and faculty integration, but social and faculty integration were not associated directly with persistence intentions. In addition, students who reported stronger availability of family support reported stronger self-efficacy. Implications for designing culturally responsive intervention programming are described. © 2001 Academic Press

This study evaluated a model of college outcomes using a sample of Latino students. The model includes four constructs: academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), stress, family support, and social integration (Tinto, 1987). Self-efficacy, in general, refers to one's judgments about one's ability to organize thoughts, feelings, and actions to produce a desired outcome (Bandura, 1986). Academic self-efficacy, in particular, denotes confidence in performing academic tasks such as reading textbooks, asking questions in class, and preparing for examinations (Solberg, O'Brien, Villarreal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993). Stronger academic self-efficacy expectations result in better college outcomes because students with high self-efficacy perceive failure experiences as challenges rather than threats (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992). Academic self-efficacy increases participation in social activities and discussions with faculty. As these performance attainments result in positive outcomes, confidence improves and increases the likelihood that these students will feel connected to their environment (Hamann, 1997; Lamborn et al., 1998). Students with higher academic self-efficacy also indicate higher persistence intentions (Karpanty, 1998). When students perceive difficult college tasks as challenges, these stronger college self-efficacy expectations lower

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academic stress and maintain psychological and emotional health (Solberg et al. 1998).

The second construct in the model is stress. High levels of stress negatively influence health. Events become perceived as stressful when the successful performance of a stress-provoking event involves expending more resources than one currently perceives available (Hobfoll, 1989). For example, students experience stress when an academic task requires skills perceived as beyond performance capability. In addition, a task within performance capability becomes stressful when students are over-extended emotionally or physically. Unchecked, high levels of stress result in negative physical, emotional, and psychological outcomes such as poor sleep, lower immune system strength, and illness (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). While negatively affecting one's emotional and psychological health (Solberg et al., 1998; Solberg, Valdez, & Villarreal, 1993; Solberg and Villarreal, 1997), higher college stress influences one's ability to connect to peers and faculty as well. Chronically high levels of college stress could influence college persistence due to continued emotional and psychological strain.

Family support systems, the model's third construct, offer a secure base throughout one's life, which provides important sources of confidence (Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1989; Ryan, Solberg, & Brown, 1996) and reduces stress. Families that provide children and adolescents with secure attachments facilitate their exploration and risk-taking activities (Guidano, 1987). Secure attachment offers additional benefits in later adolescence (Lopez, 1992). College students with high perceived availability of family support build connections with faculty and other students and believe in their ability to complete their academic goals. In addition, for Latino students, one implication of growing up within a collectivist culture is the central role of family connections and harmony on their health (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988).

Social integration, the fourth construct in the model being tested, refers to students' perception of connection to their institution and faculty. Students who connect to the formal academic learning environment as well as the social and cultural milieu of the academic community at large feel a sense of belonging to the campus which results in a desire to stay and complete their educational goals (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1993; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1980). Achieving success in both college and work settings results from building effective relationships with peers and authority figures. In college, students who do not build effective connections to peers and faculty likely feel alienated or marginalized. These students may leave college because remaining within a social context of continued alienation is self-defeating.

The present study evaluated the ability of the model, and its four constructs, to explain Latino college student outcomes and health (see Fig. 1). The first major paths in the model posit that family support directly influences level of both academic self-efficacy and academic stress (Lamborn et al., 1998; Solberg et al., 1998). Among Latino college students, correlations between social support and academic self-efficacy have been reported between .45 and .39 (Hamann, 1997; Solberg & Villarreal, 1997), and correlations between social support and academic

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