

Positive Psychology and Familial Factors as Predictors of Latina/o Students' Psychological Grit

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Abstract

Positive psychology is a useful framework to understand Latina/o students' experiences. In the current study, we examined how presence of meaning in life, search for meaning in life, hope, and family importance influenced 128 Latina/o college students' psychological grit. We used the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), Subjective Happiness Scale, Hope Scale, Pan-Hispanic Familism Scale, and Short Grit Scale to measure the aforementioned factors. Using multiple regression analysis, findings indicated that hope and search for meaning in life were significant predictors of psychological grit. Higher levels of hope positively predicted psychological grit, while higher levels of search for meaning in life negatively predicted psychological grit. We provide a discussion regarding the importance of these findings as well as recommendations for future research.

Keywords

Latina/o students, psychological grit, positive psychology

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Although educational research is important, there is a dearth of literature regarding positive psychology factors that influence Latina/o students. One of the most important constructs in the psychology literature is psychological grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Given that psychological grit is related to academic performance (Duckworth et al., 2007), investigating predictors of psychological grit among Latina/o college students is a worthwhile research endeavor. The purpose of this study is to extend current literature by examining factors that influence Latina/o college students' psychological grit. First, we provide a literature review concerning factors that might influence Latina/o students' psychological grit. We focus on meaning in life, happiness, hope, and familism as a conceptual framework. Next, we present quantitative findings from Latina/o students from a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Finally, we provide a discussion regarding the importance of these findings as well as implications for research.

Review of Literature

Researchers are beginning to utilize a strength-based approach to understand factors that contribute to Latina/o students' positive psychological functioning (Dunn & O'Brien, 2009; Navarro, Schwartz, Ojeda, & Pina-Watson, 2014; Ojeda, Castillo, Rosales Meza, & Pina-Watson, 2014; Ojeda, Flores, & Navarro, 2011) and academic resilience (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; Morales, 2008). A useful conceptual approach to understanding human development is positive psychology (Seligman, 2002). Compared with examining deficits or problems, positive psychology focuses on strengths, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction (Vela, Castro, Cavazos, Cavazos, & Gonzalez, 2014). By using a positive psychology paradigm, researchers understand factors that contribute to positive psychological functioning and resilience among students and/or adults (Seligman, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Researchers used a positive psychology framework to understand college students' subjective happiness (Vela, Castro, et al., 2014), goal-specific hope (Feldman, Rand, & Kahle-Wroblewski, 2009), life satisfaction (Ojeda et al., 2014), and hope (Maybury, 2013). In the context of a positive psychology framework, presence of meaning in life, search for meaning in life, subjective happiness, and hope are important factors to consider when examining psychological grit. As a result, we use positive psychology and familial factors as a conceptual framework to understand Latina/o college students' psychological grit.

Meaning in Life

Meaning in life is a psychological strength (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006) and a fundamental tenant of positive psychology (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Meaning in life refers to a process of self-discovery of meaning in life (Frankl, 1963; Steger & Shin, 2010). Steger and Shin (2010) proposed two components of meaning in life: presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life. Presence of meaning in life refers to current attribution of meaning in one's life, while search for meaning in life relates to motivation toward finding meaning in life (Steger & Shin, 2010). There is a growing body of literature that points to a positive relationship between meaning in life and mental health and academic outcomes (Brassai, Piko, & Steger, 2011; Steger & Shin, 2010; Vela, Castro, et al., 2014). Dogra, Basu, and Das (2011) illustrated how meaning in life enhanced psychological well-being among college students. When college students perceive meaning in life, they are more likely to select and pursue goals as well as identify positive aspects in negative situations. In another investigation, Vela, Lerma, et al. (2014) investigated the relationship among meaning in life, search for meaning in life, and generation status on Latina/o college students' hope. In addition to a positive relationship between presence of meaning in life and hope, they found a negative relationship between search for meaning in life and goal-specific hope. For Latina/o college students who search for meaning in life, hope for future goals might be lower (Vela, Lerma, et al., 2014). Some students might also be in crisis status as outlined in Marcia's (1966) identity statuses. That is, Latina/o students might experience identity moratorium in which they struggle to explore various commitments. Although researchers investigated the relationship among meaning in life and happiness, no study investigated how meaning in life impacts Latina/o college students' psychological grit.

Happiness

An important variable in positive psychology involves happiness due to the relationship with life satisfaction, psychological well-being (Segrin & Taylor, 2007), and academic motivation (Gabriele, 2008), among others (Seligman, 2002). Subjective happiness refers to individual perceptions of happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2001) that is related to higher self-esteem, greater career satisfaction (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005), higher academic motivation, (Gabriele, 2008), and better self-perceived meaning in life (Vela, Castro, et al., 2014). Vela, Castro, and others (2014) investigated the relationship among meaning in life, happiness, and spirituality with Latina/o college

students. They noted a positive relationship between presence of meaning in life and subjective happiness. They commented, “Latina/o college students who have a greater presence of meaning in life might be more likely to pursue higher academic goals and work hard toward such goals” (p. 14). In another study, Denny and Steiner (2009) found that self-esteem, lack of distress, and mindfulness contributed to elite athletes’ happiness. For elite athletes, feeling good about one’s self was related to perceptions of happiness. Taken together, the aforementioned findings show that multiple factors have potential to influence subjective happiness. However, no study to date investigated the relationship between happiness and psychological grit among Latina/o college students.

Hope

Another important factor in positive psychology is hope due to the relationship with academic performance (Snyder et al., 2002), goal attainment (Feldman et al., 2009), future academic achievement, mental health (Marques, Pais-Ribeiro, & Lopez, 2011), and meaning in life (Vela, Lerma, et al., 2014). Snyder et al. (1991) proposed Hope Theory with two components: pathways and agency. First, pathways thinking refers to individuals’ plans to pursue desired objectives as well as perceived beliefs to pursue objectives (Feldman & Dreher, 2012). Second, agency thinking refers to “thoughts that people have regarding their ability to begin and continue movement on selected pathways toward those goals” (Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999, p. 180). Researchers found a positive relationship between hope and higher course grades, better graduation rates, and enhanced athletic performance (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997; Snyder et al., 2002). In addition, Rand, Martin, and Shea (2011) found that hope predicted academic performance among first-year law students. They also highlighted how hope influenced academic performance beyond effects of previous academic performance and ability (e.g., Law School Admissions Test [LSAT] score). Given the relationship among hope, academic performance, and positive psychological functioning, it is important to understand how hope impacts Latina/o college students’ psychological grit.

Family Importance

Family importance has been found to consistently impact Latina/o students’ academic performance and life satisfaction. Marin and Marin (1991) noted that *familiasmo* refers to loyalty and solidarity to the family unit. Important parts of *familiasmo* involve family connectedness, including perceptions of

family identity, family mutual activities, and family cohesion (Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012). Several researchers illustrated the important role of family among Latina/o adolescents' and adults' academic resilience and mental health (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). In a study involving resilient Latina/o college students, Cavazos et al. (2010) found that family were integral components of personal resilience. Family support provided not only support and encouragement but also motivation to pursue and fulfill academic expectations. This finding is similar to Ceballo's (2004) finding that Latina/o college students revealed parents' emphasis on education is vital to positive academic performance. Finally, Edwards and Lopez (2006) found that Mexican American adolescents' perceived family support was related to life satisfaction. In summary, family plays an important role in academic and personal resilience among Latina/o adolescents and adults.

Psychological Grit

One of the most important factors in the psychology literature is psychological grit due to its relationship with academic outcomes (Duckworth et al., 2007). Psychological grit is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). Researchers found that psychological grit is related to academic performance, retention rate in a military-disciplined summer program (e.g., at West Point), performance in a national contest (e.g., the National Spelling Bee; Duckworth et al., 2007), and effectiveness among novice teachers (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). In a comprehensive study involving psychological grit and passion for long-term goals, Duckworth and others (2007) examined grit in the following populations: undergraduate students at Ivy League institutions, students in the United States Military Academy, West Point cadets, and performers in the National Spelling Bee. Across these six studies, psychological grit accounted for differences in success and performance beyond IQ (Duckworth et al., 2007). First, undergraduate students at an elite university with higher levels of psychological grit had higher grade point averages. Second, students in the National Spelling Bee with higher levels of psychological grit outperformed their counterparts with less psychological grit. And finally, for individuals who were the same age, those with higher psychological grit had higher levels of education compared with those with lower psychological grit. Although researchers highlighted relationships among academic performance and psychological grit, no study to date used a positive psychology and familial framework to examine predictors of psychological grit among Latina/o college students. If psychological grit is related to academic performance

and other important outcomes (Duckworth et al., 2007), it is important to understand predictors of Latina/o college students' psychological grit.

In summary, positive psychology and familial factors have potential to impact Latina/o college students' psychological grit. Researchers identified that meaning in life is related to academic motivation, career planning (Gabriele, 2008), and subjective happiness (Vela, Castro, et al., 2014). Other researchers also highlighted how family is related to Latina/o college students' academic outcomes and life satisfaction (Edwards & Lopez, 2006; Zalaquett, 2006). In addition, researchers found that psychological grit predicts academic success, retention in summer programs at West Point, and performance in the national spelling bee (Duckworth et al., 2007). Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to augment previous literature by examining predictors of Latina/o college students' psychological grit. Based on previous research, it appears likely that presence of meaning in life, search for meaning in life, happiness, hope, and family have potential to influence psychological grit among Latina/o college students. Therefore, we explored the following research question:

Research Question 1: To what extent do positive psychology and familial factors predict Latina/o college students' psychological grit?

Method

Participants

We used criterion sampling to collect data for the current study. The lead researcher identified large undergraduate courses to recruit Latina/o participants. One hundred twenty-eight students enrolled at a HSI provided data. The HSI had an enrollment of approximately 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students (approximately 93% of students at this institution are Latina/o). This sample included 53 men (41%) and 75 women (59%) who self-identified as Hispanic, Mexican, or Mexican American ethnic identities. Among participants, 72 self-identified as Latina/o or Hispanic (56%), 40 described themselves as Mexican American (24%), with 15 indicating a Mexican ethnic identity (9%). Related to generation status, participants identified the following from a checklist: first-generation ($n = 21$, 12%), second generation ($n = 69$, 41%), third generation ($n = 10$, 6%), fourth generation ($n = 19$, 11%), and fifth generation ($n = 8$, 5%). Finally, average students' self-reported grade point averages were 3.08 ($SD = 0.38$).

Measurements

Meaning in life. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006) is a self-report inventory to measure individuals' search for and presence of meaning in life. Participants responded to 10 statements evaluated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *absolutely untrue* (1) to *absolutely true* (7). The MLQ is divided into two subscales: presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life (Steger et al., 2006). A sample item for the presence subscale includes, "I understand my life's meaning." A sample item for the search subscale includes, "I am always looking to find my life's purpose." For the current administration, the mean score for presence of meaning in life was 28.38 ($SD = 5.82$) while the mean score for search for meaning was 24.90 ($SD = 8.25$). Reliability coefficients for scores on the total scale and subscales were measured in previous samples using coefficient alpha. Vela, Lerma, et al. (2014) found reliability coefficients of .87 for the search subscale and .71 for the presence subscale. Reliability coefficients in the present sample for scores on each subscale were strong: search, $\alpha = .90$ and presence, $\alpha = .87$.

Subjective happiness. The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) is a self-report inventory (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) to measure individuals' perceptions of happiness. Participants responded to four statements evaluated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The mean score is used to create a happiness score with higher scores reflective of higher levels of subjective happiness. For the current administration, the mean score was 5.37 ($SD = 1.05$). Reliability coefficients for scores on the total scale were measured in previous samples using coefficient alpha. Vela, Castro, et al. (2014) found a reliability coefficient of .73 in a study with Latina/o college students. The internal consistency of the SHS in the current study was .73.

Hope. The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) is a self-report inventory to measure participants' attitudes toward goals and objectives. The Hope Scale is divided into two subscales: agency and pathways. Participants responded to eight statements evaluated on an 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from *definitely true* (8) to *definitely false* (1). A sample response item includes, "I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me." For the current administration, the mean score was 54.49 ($SD = 7.10$). Reliability coefficients for scores on the total scale were measured in previous samples using coefficient alpha. Snyder et al. (2002) found $\alpha = .86$ for the total Hope Scale in a study with college freshmen. For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha was .85.

Familiasmo. The Pan-Hispanic Familism Scale (Villarreal, Blozis, & Widaman, 2005) is a self-report inventory to measure perceptions of family importance. Participants responded to five statements evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). The mean score is used to determine level of family importance with higher scores reflective of greater significance. A sample response item includes, "My family is always there for me in times of need." For the current administration, the mean score was 4.51 ($SD = 0.63$). Reliability coefficients for scores on the total scale were measured in previous samples using coefficient alpha. Pina-Watson, Ojeda, Castellon, and Dornhecker (2013) found $\alpha = .87$ in a study regarding Mexican American adolescents' positive psychological functioning. The internal consistency of the familism scale in the current study was .83.

Psychological grit. The Short Grit Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) is a self-report inventory to measure perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Participants responded to eight statements evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *very much like me* (5) to *not at all like me* (1). A sample response item includes, "Setbacks don't discourage me." For the current administration, the mean score was 3.52 ($SD = 0.61$). Reliability coefficients for scores on the total scale were measured in previous samples using coefficient alpha. Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, and Ericsson (2011) found $\alpha = .82$ in a study regarding the National Spelling Bee. The internal consistency of the Short Grit Scale in the current study was .73.

Procedures

We implemented several steps to gather data in the current study. First, we informed participants that participation was voluntary and participation would not affect their grade or affiliation with the university. We obtained informed consent from all participants in the current study. Next, we distributed a packet to participants that included a demographic form, MLQ, SHS, Hope Scale, and Pan-Hispanic Familism Scale. We created a demographic form to gather information on participants' age, ethnic background, gender, grade point average, academic aspirations, and generation status. We then collected all completed surveys. Finally, scores from all data were compiled, entered into a data management software program, and scores among scales were computed.

Data Analysis

Statistical power analysis. We conducted an a priori power analysis using G*Power 3 statistical power analysis program (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, &

Table 1. Evaluation of Bivariate Correlations Among Predictor Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	Variance Inflation Factor
1. Family support	—	.45	-.05	.32	.37	1.39
2. Subjective happiness		—	-.09	.35	.30	1.35
3. Search for meaning			—	-.20	-.07	1.04
4. Presence of meaning				—	.49	1.47
5. Hope					—	1.43

Buchner, 2007) to identify the number of participants required to establish statistical power for our research design at the .80 level given $\alpha = .05$. This analysis indicated that a minimal sample size of 55 was necessary to detect a moderate effect of our predictor variables for estimating change among characteristics comprising psychological grit. Given our sample of 128 participants, we submit that the results of our analysis are robust enough to make predictive inferences about the relationships between predictor and criterion variables.

Preliminary analyses. Missing values within the raw data (31 of 4,170, 0.006%) were imputed using the series mean function in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 22 (IBM Corporation, 2013). Multicollinearity among predictor variables was evaluated by inspecting bivariate correlations and variance inflation factors (see Table 1). Stevens (2009) suggested that high intercorrelations between predictor variables may be indicative of unstable predictive models. Our analyses revealed low intercorrelations among predictor and criterion variables and variance inflation factors within the acceptable range, thus justifying the inclusion of the selected scales within a single regression model. Finally, we did not analyze differences across gender or classification. Almost all of the students in the current study were classified as juniors or seniors. For gender, recent findings suggest that Latino males and Latina females do not have conceptually different mental health experiences or perceptions of support (Vela, Castro, et al., 2014; Vela, Zamarripa, Balkin, Johnson, & Smith, 2014).

Primary analysis. We modeled relationships between our predictor and criterion variables using a simultaneous multiple regression model to evaluate our research questions related to the degree that subjective happiness, subtypes of meaning, perceptions of family support, and perceived hope were predictive of psychological grit. In this model, the five predictor variables (subjective

Table 2. Summary of Variables Predicting Psychological Grit.

Variable	B	SE B	β	T	sr^2	F	R ²
Psychological grit						10.95	.35
Family support	.04	.08	.04	0.42	<.01		
Subjective happiness	.07	.05	.11	1.20	<.01		
Search for meaning	-.01	<.01	-.18	-2.38*	.02		
Presence of meaning	.01	<.01	.10	1.18	<.01		
Hope	.04	<.01	.41	4.71**	.13		

*Significant at the .05 level. **Significant at the .01 level.

happiness, subtypes of meaning, perceptions of family support, and perceived hope) were regressed onto the psychological grit criterion values. Regression coefficients and metrics of practice significance were inspected.

Results

The regression analysis yielded a statistically significant model, $F(6, 127) = 10.95$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .35$, indicative of a large effect size in which model predictors account for approximately 35% of the change among psychological grit scores (see Table 2). Within the model, scores associated with participant perceptions of hope yielded the strongest positive association ($\beta = .04$, $p < .01$, $sr^2 = .13$), indicative of a medium effect size. Among the variables for meaning and spirituality, search for meaning was negatively correlated with scores related to psychological grit ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .02$, $sr^2 = .02$), indicative of a small effect size, while presence of meaning was not significantly related ($\beta = .01$, $p = .24$, $sr^2 < .01$). Non-significant findings were also detected for scores related to subjective happiness ($\beta = .06$, $p = .20$, $sr^2 < .01$) and perceptions of family importance ($\beta = .04$, $p = .67$, $sr^2 < .01$).

Discussion

The growth of the Latina/o population and the dearth of quantitative studies regarding the influence of factors on psychological grit among Latina/o college students prompted the current study in which we examined the extent to which positive psychology and familial factors influenced Latina/o college students' psychological grit. Hope served as the strongest predictor of psychological grit among Latina/o college students. This finding suggests that as the amount of hope increases, the level of psychological grit among Latina/o college students increases. This finding builds on previous

research that found hope was related to academic performance (Snyder et al., 2002), goal attainment (Feldman et al., 2009), future academic achievement, and mental health (Marques et al., 2011). Given the predictive relationship between hope and psychological grit, we suggest that practitioners can help Latina/o students increase hope, which in turn might enhance psychological grit. In addition, search for meaning in life had a negative relationship with psychological grit. This finding suggests that Latina/o students who search for meaning and purpose in life might have less psychological grit compared with students who perceive meaning in life. This finding is consistent with previous researchers who posited that search for meaning in life has a negative relationship with Latina/o college students' goal-specific hope (Vela, Lerma, et al., 2014). College students who search for meaning in life might experience identity moratorium in which they explore various commitments (Marcia, 1966; Vela, Lerma, et al., 2014). There is also evidence to suggest that individuals with inadequate meaning in life might be less resourceful in stressful situations (Dogra et al., 2011). We recommend that counselors and psychologists help Latina/o college students search for meaning in life, thereby possibly influencing psychological grit (Steger & Shin, 2010).

The importance of family was also used as part of a conceptual framework to understand Latina/o students' psychological grit. In the current study, familismo did not contribute to the overall prediction of psychological grit among Latina/o college students. Although researchers found family support contributed to Latina/o students' life satisfaction and academic resilience (Cavazos et al., 2010; Edwards & Lopez, 2008) as well as Mexican American adolescents' positive psychological functioning (Pina-Watson et al., 2013), this is one of the first investigations that did not find a relationship between family and psychological grit. Given the central role that family plays among Latina/o students and adolescents, it was surprising that family did not predict students' psychological grit. There are several possibilities for this unexpected finding. First, it is possible that other factors are more important in determining psychological grit at the collegiate level. Future studies should continue to examine other familial (e.g., ethnic identity and cultural values), individual, and interpersonal (e.g., support from mentors or peers) factors on Latina/o students' psychological grit. Second, we agree with Ojeda and Pina-Watson (2013) who speculated that the Pan-Hispanic Family Scale only measures beliefs about family systems (familismo) and not actual contact. Future research should include behavioral familism as part of a conceptual framework to understand psychological grit.

There also are other directions for research. First, outcome-based research with Latina/o students is needed. Researchers should test the

efficacy of interventions to increase Latina/o students' meaning in life, hope, and psychological grit. There are several possible interventions, including Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990), Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2002), positive interventions (Giannopoulos & Vella-Brodrick, 2011), and group counseling (He & Fan, 2010). Researchers must examine interventions that increase factors related to Latina/o students' psychological grit. Second, future research can benefit from an ecological framework to explore how individual, interpersonal, and institutional factors impact Latina/o students' psychological grit. For Latina/o high school students, important institutional factors include perceptions of school climate and a college-going culture as well as access to Advanced Placement (AP) coursework. Important interpersonal factors include perceptions of support from parents, teachers, and counselors. Using an ecological framework can account for complex interactions among individual, interpersonal, and institutional factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Byrd & McKinney, 2012). In addition, longitudinal studies are important to understand temporal changes in factors that impact Latina/o students' psychological grit. Almost all studies involving Latina/o students used cross-sectional, correlational methods. Future research should use longitudinal methods to address limitations in the current study and previous research. Finally, researchers can compare first-year and upper division university students' psychological grit. Exploring psychological grit among first-year Latina/o college students is an important research endeavor.

There are several limitations that must be taken into consideration. First, we relied on cross-sectional, correlation data, which limit cause-and-effect inferences. Second, we relied on students' self-report perceptions of positive psychology factors. We agree that some students may lack insight into their feelings and perceptions or provide socially desirable responses (Alvarado & Ricard, 2013; Zalaquett, 2006). Third, we used purposive and not random sampling in the current study (Vela, Lerma, et al., 2014). Fourth, the homogeneity and university environment might impact broader generalizability (Watson, 2009). Participants in the current study attended a HSI with more than 93% Hispanic students. Results, therefore, might only be applicable to Latina/o students who attend similar institutions. In addition, we only surveyed successful Latina/o students as defined by enrollment in postsecondary education. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study on Latina/o high school students' psychological grit. Finally, we used the Pan-Hispanic Familism Scale (Villarreal et al., 2005) to measure family importance. Future studies can use scales that focus on behavioral familism in addition to attitudinal familism.

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