

The two articles I have chosen to review and analyze based on class discussions and readings focus on quantitative research done in the area of depression among Latino/a adolescents living in the United States. The first article (Roberts, Roberts, & Chen, 1995) discusses research approaches in which Latino/a youth are compared Latino/a youth with Anglo youth in regard to levels of depression and suicidal ideation. This article also examines gender differences in depression and suicide ideation among both the group of Latino/a adolescents and the sample of Anglo adolescents. The authors discuss a study in which Latino/a youth reported higher levels of depression and suicide ideation than Anglo youth. Furthermore, Latina girls reported higher levels of depression compared with Latino boys and Anglo girls. In the second article, the authors (Cuellar & Roberts, 1997) do not compare Latino/a youth with non-Latino white adolescents or other ethnic minority adolescents. Instead, the researchers discuss a study aimed at examining differences in depression between low and high-accultured Latino/a adolescents, boys and girls, high and low SES status adolescents, and Latino/a youth who self-identified as either Mexican American, Mexican National, or Hispanic. The researchers found significant differences between various groups and conclude that these differences are due to cultural differences (e.g., ethnicity, SES) among the sample of Latino/a youth.

I will draw from class readings and discussions to criticize aspects of the research approach of both articles, and I will examine the feasibility of employing alternative research approaches to enrich current research on the psychological well-being of Latino/a adolescents. By doing so, I will move back and forth between the two articles I have chosen to review. This critique, however, is not an exhaustive one. There are many ways in which one may critique other scholars' research.. In this paper, I will highlight those aspects that are most obvious to me.

The main strength of both articles is that the researchers investigate the psychological-well being of Latino/a youth in the United States. Research on adolescents in general is scarce and research on ethnic minority adolescents is even scarcer. Therefore, I view research discusses in the two articles as an important first step in exploring the well-being of Latino/a children.

One of the weaknesses in both articles is the employed research methodology because it is based on a comparative/deviance approach. Latino/a children are compared with Anglo children, Latina girls are compared with Latino boys, and Latino/a children are compared against each other. At least three of our course readings (Landrine, 1995; Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998) criticize the current practice in psychological research of using deviant or comparison models when conducting ethnic minority research and research examining the well-being of girls and women. These researchers argue that these models view ethnic minorities from the perspective of traditional White cultural patterns or lifestyle. That is, comparative research approaches are based on the assumption that behavior patterns, disorders, and values are universal across populations. For example, researchers who compare Latino boys with Latina girls in measures of depression assume that boys and girls do not differ in the way they may experience, express, and conceptualize depression. Similarly, researchers who compare Latino/a youth with Anglo youth, frame their research question with the assumption that depression is a problem experienced among Latinos/as alike and that it is expressed and conceptualized in the same way. Deviance models, in addition to making above-mentioned assumptions, assume that people who deviate from universal behavior do not meet normal standards and are thus, inferior or abnormal. That is, researchers who employ deviance models in studying depression among Latino/a adolescents assume that Latinos/as should report similar levels of depression than Anglo youth. When Latino/a youth report higher levels of depression

than Anglo youth, it is assumed that something is wrong with Latino/a youth. Similarly, research aimed at comparing Latino boys with girls assume that girls should report equal levels of depression compared with boys. Any differences found between an ethnic minority and white group are viewed as deviant or inferior and are linked to the view that ethnic minorities live in deprivation or less advantageous environments. As a result, interventions are often aimed at altering the deviant behavior or the less advantageous environment in which many ethnic minorities live. A similar pattern has been observed and criticized in research examining gender differences in psychological well-being because differences among girls and boys are attributed to girls being inferior and deviant compared with the male standard. Landrine (1995), Hughes et al. (1993); and Cauce et al. (1998) propose that studies utilizing a comparative/deviance framework will always reveal differences between males and females, Latinos/as and Whites or other ethnic minorities maybe because they are based on the assumption that behaviors and disorders are universal phenomena. Under these assumptions it makes sense to compare groups of people and conclude that people different from the norm are deficient and inferior. While observed differences may help researchers identify areas that may need further attention, the identification of observed differences is meaningless as long as researchers are unable to explain the origin of these between group differences. It seems that efforts aimed at understanding the origins of differences may depend on methodologies that investigate the context, culture, etc. of different groups of people. For example, in order to develop effective prevention and intervention studies researchers need to understand the origins of group differences.

Another weakness of the studies reported in the two articles is that the researchers employ measures (e.g., CES-D) originally designed for the use on European Americans. This practice may be due to the assumption that behaviors and illnesses are universal phenomena.

Hughes et al., 1993 discuss how researchers “question the validity of studies utilizing constructs and measures developed in one cultural group to understand phenomenon in another” because cultural norms, values, ideas, historical background, and experiences can influence the development, content, and interpretation of the constructs. Therefore, research findings involving Latino/a children when using constructs meant to measure behavior patterns in Anglo American children may not be meaningful because they may measure something else. Similarly, many constructs have been validated with male participants. However, these measures are regularly employed in examining behavior patterns in girls. The employment of measures with populations for which measures were not intended can render research findings meaningless or misleading. According to Hughes et al. (1993) comparison and deviance models can lead to the formulation of stereotypes because the only thing these models do, is point out differences by comparing minority groups (cultural minorities and women) against a standard (Euro American, male) without explaining the nature of the differences.

Furthermore, researchers commonly critique the lack of theory when formulating research questions and when discussing research in which gender or ethnic differences were found. Differences often remain unexplained or basic general conclusions are employed that blame the participants’ culture, class status, or lacking environment. For example, Cauce et al. (1998) recommend to always include a measure of acculturation, immigrant status, ethnicity, class status, neighborhood factors, and family structure among other measures in order to gain a better picture of why and how ethnic minorities differ from the majority group and in order to overcome factors that may be confounded with the measure in question. For example, the inclusion of an acculturation measure, in addition, to a depression measure may provide the researchers with additional information that may be related to depression in Latino/a adolescents.

The study discussed in the first article I have chosen did not measure acculturation, immigrant status, socioeconomic status (SES is a proxy for class), or other relevant measures. In the second article, the researchers included a measure of acculturation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status but the investigators did not try to explain observed differences from a theoretical perspective. The researchers simply concluded that observed differences between participants are due to cultural differences without directly measuring what exactly about the participants' culture contributed to the differences. Additionally, the authors failed to inform the reader how they defined culture. In both articles, the researchers did not include any measures that could provide insight in why Latino girls differ from Latino boys and Latino/a children differ from Anglo children in reported levels of depression.

In sum, both articles employ a comparative/deviance approach in examining the psychological well-being of Latino/a children. Both articles fail to apply theory in explaining the existence of observed gender and ethnic group differences, and both articles employ measures that have not been validated and developed for the use on Latino/as, women, and girls.

It is an easy task to criticize someone else's work with arguments other scholars have developed. It is more difficult to come up with ways to enrich and alter established research designs. In the following sections, I will try to draw from class readings and discussions on research methodologies employed by researchers interested in ethnic minority research. In particular, I will examine how focus groups and qualitative interviews may be possible tools to learn more about the origins of gender and ethnic minority differences in well-being. Finally, I will analyze participatory research, as one possible way of including community members in the development of research questions.

Social scientists and feminist researchers alike often advocate for the use of qualitative research methods when conducting research with ethnic minorities, girls, and women. Qualitative research methodologies allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of lived experiences and the meanings of events in the lives of research participants. For example, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups with Latino/a adolescents may be one way for researchers to gain a better understanding of why Latino/a children report higher levels of depression than Anglo children. Similarly, qualitative methods may help researchers identify why girls report higher levels of depression than boys. Also, knowledge gained from interviews or focus groups may be utilized to develop and validate measures and scales designed for use with Latino/a adolescents as well as with boys and girls. Furthermore, qualitative data may provide insights into the context in which behaviors/disorders occur in the lives of research participants. As discussed by Landrine (1995) understanding the context in which behaviors and disorders occur is crucial because people's experiences, cultural norms, and values influence the quality of behavior patterns. Similarly, behaviors may take on different meanings in different contexts. For example, depression in Latino/a adolescents may manifest itself differently from Anglo youth because the existence and/or expression of depression may depend on the experiences, cultural norms and values of different groups of people. Symptoms of depression may have different meanings in different contexts. In her article, Landrine argues that a behavior has to be "discovered empirically by analyzing the context", and the behavior can only be named in the context in which it occurs. Landrine's example of the meaning of silence shows how context can shape the meaning of a behavior. For example, silence could mean "respect for teachers", "avoiding being hit by a violent husband", and "distrust of others" depending on the individuals experiences, culture, and the context in

which silence occurs. Along the same lines, depression may or may not exist among Latino/a adolescents, it may be expressed or experienced differently, and behaviors related to depression among Anglo children may not be related to depression in Latino/a children. Thus, qualitative research methods may enhance current research done in regard to depression among Latino/a adolescents.

There are various ways in which a researcher may study the context in which behaviors occur. A researcher interested in studying depression among Latino/a adolescents may do so by conducting individual in-depth interviews with a group of Latino/a adolescents. In the interviews, the researcher may ask open-ended questions about the cultural context of the participant, daily stressors, his/her ethnic identity, and about topics that may give the interviewer a sense of how the participant conceptualizes or expresses depression. Another possible way of gaining knowledge about the context in which behaviors occur is the implementation of focus groups. In focus groups, a researcher interested in studying depression among Latino/a adolescents, for example, may bring a group of Latino/a adolescents together and the researcher provides the participants with a set of issues for the group to discuss. The researcher can then learn from the focus group discussions about the context and meaning of behaviors among Latino/a adolescents. The discussion guide may focus on those aspects in depression the researcher is interested in studying. Researchers may then be able to develop culturally sensitive interventions that are not based on findings from comparative/deficiency research approaches.

Compared to comparative/deviance approaches in studying depression among Latino/a adolescents, the focus group approach and in-depth qualitative interview approach, may be better suited for learning about the context in which depression occurs. However, both, the comparative and the qualitative research approach requires the investigator to enter the research

arena with a specific research question and with a specific set of assumptions. For example, a researcher interested in studying depression among Latina girls assumes from the outset that depression is a problem among Latina girls. These researchers are subject to stereotypes that may guide influence every step of the research process. For example, the researcher may frame his/her discussion/interview questions in a way that could confirm his/her preconception about depression in Latina adolescents.

In sum, while qualitative interviews and focus groups represent more meaningful ways than comparative methods in studying depression among Latino/a adolescents, these methods do not seem to eliminate preconceptions, stereotypes, and even misconceptions about depression in Latino/a youth because the research question is based on findings in which Latino/a youth were compared against other groups (e.g., Anlog children). The fact that the initial research question is built on findings that worked under the assumption that depression is a universal phenomenon and that did not take the context of Latino/a children into account, renders interviews and focus groups somewhat superficial. Therefore, we may need research methodologies that allow a researcher to study a population from the beginning and that may allow the population under investigation to guide the nature of the research question. The principles of participatory research, as discussed by Maguire (2008) in her essay “Feminist Participatory Research” provide possible guidelines for overcoming these shortcomings.

One of the premises of participatory research is the involvement of the community in “problem posing and solving.” That is, in participatory research, “a community group, working with a researcher, names existing problems which they want to eliminate or change.” For example, when studying the psychological well-being of Latino/a adolescents an investigator may become involved in community based activities that may link him/her to a community of



Latino/adolescents. It is then through interaction with a group of Latino/a adolescents that a research question may be posed. It is the problems posed by Latino/a adolescents that become the subsequent basis for research. The research group, that is the investigator and the community, investigates the “why’s and how’s of the problem.” In the case of Latino adolescents, researchers instead of studying depression may end up studying whatever problems a particular group of Latino/a adolescents identifies. It is through a collective process that data is collected, analyzed, and utilized. This research process may guard researchers from wrongly comparing Latino/a adolescents against Anglo children and girls against boys because it allows participants to pose research questions and to determine the meaning of research findings.

While participatory research may be one way of enriching currently employed research with Latino/a adolescents, it is rarely if ever employed. I have not encountered any study in which researchers collaborated with the community in order to frame more meaningful questions and make more accurate conclusions about research findings. It is time, that researcher aimed at improving the lives of ethnic minority children and girls begin to ask meaningful research questions and to analyze and interpret data in meaningful ways.