Gender and Ethnicity in the Early Adolescent Screening Process for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Summary of Two Studies

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Objectives

Present the results of two, separate research studies related to screening for EBD in early secondary settings

- Latino students
- Gender
Discussion Questions

- How can future research consider gender and ethnicity in designing effective screening measures and processes?

- How can practitioners use culturally sensitive screening measures and processes, given the emerging research that is available?
General Overview

These studies were part of a larger project that addressed several research questions:

1. Can we identify early adolescent youth who may be at risk for EBD?

2. Can we intervene in ways that result in long-term positive change?
Latino Students Identified as At Risk for Emotional or Behavioral Disorders: Descriptions of their School Experience

A dissertation completed by
Ryan Balagna

Supervised by Ellie L. Young
Background

- Latino students are the fastest growing and largest ethnic minority in the U.S.
  - 19.8% of the school population

- Latino students tend to face poor educational outcomes
  - They have the highest drop out rate of any minority group
  - One in three Latino students do not complete high school
  - Drop out rate is 4x higher than Caucasians and
  - 2x higher than African Americans
Latinos in Special Education

• Disproportional overrepresentation in all disability groups

• Disproportional overrepresentation in EBD categories when the setting was predominantly Caucasian

• May be due to lack of culturally sensitive measures and culturally responsive processes and practices

• May be a mismatch between Latino culture and the mainstream educational environment
Research Question

How do early adolescent Latino students identified as at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders describe their student-teacher relationships and school experiences?
Method

Setting
– Mid-size suburban and rural school district in the western U.S.
– 9% of students were Hispanic & 90% Caucasian in the school setting
Participants

- 11 sixth grade (middle school) Latino students identified through a teacher nomination process
  - modified Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD)
- 8 males and 3 females
- All qualified for free/reduced school lunch
- 8 Externalizers (and all males) 2 Internalizers, and 1 internalizer/externalizer
- Average 6th grade GPA was 2.5
- Average ODR for 6th grade was 2
  - Range 0-6
- All parents of students were from Mexico, except one set of parents from Central America
- Nine of the students came from two parent homes
- Spanish was the primary language for all of the parents
Data Collection

– Approximately 60 minute, taped semi-structured individual interviews that focused on describing school experiences
  • Conducted at home

– Follow up interviews (15-20 minutes) with participants

– Interviews conducted in English at the preference of the adolescent
Data Analysis

• Understanding the context of the interviewees is essential
  – Meaning interpretation approach

• The primary researcher and another member of the research team reviewed all transcripts and independently and collaboratively developed the themes

• Understanding researcher expectations
  – We expected some cultural mismatches between school and home environments
  – We did not expect students to talk about difficult experiences with peers regarding negative ethnic statements
Results

• Major Themes
  – Peers
  – Teachers
  – Orientation/Adjustment
  – Home Life
Peers

• Other students made frequent, negative verbal statements about ethnicity
  
  – “Mexicans are stupid and dumb.”
  – “Go back to Mexico.”
  – “The call me and my friends ‘beaners’ or like ‘wetbacks.’ Or they ask me where my green card is and stuff and they tell us to go back to our country.”
  – Participants perceived that these statements were generally made out of the awareness of school personnel
    • Few effective responses from adults
    • Latinos become angry and may defend themselves and report getting in trouble
Friends

- Friends are a source of support, protection, and strength
- “I have White friends and [other White kids] don’t mess with me because some of my older White friends stick up for me.”
- “When I have trouble with my homework, they [friends] help me.”

- One student indicated that they only way she was able to do math questions correctly on the board was because a friend sitting a few seats behind her consistently passed her a note with the correct answer without the teacher noticing.

- Talking to other students in class gets them in trouble but may be perceived as a way to academically survive in the classroom
  - The conversation may have been about completing academic tasks

- Friends provide support
  - “If you get in trouble, then we’ll get in trouble.”
Teachers

• Kindness and Leniency
  – “If you tell her why your homework is late, then she understands. She’ll give you a couple of more days to do it.”
  – “If you have a bad grade in her class, you just do a little extra credit and boost it up a lot.”

• Individual Attention & Personal Interest
  – “They try to get to know everybody and they ask you what you did over the weekend.”
  – Another student reported that teachers shared “life stories and experiences.”
  – A favorite teacher would sit down next to the participant during class and explain things to him.
• Active and Engaging Teachers
  – Energetic, upbeat, creative, and fun.
  – “The teacher, she invented games, but she does it with math so we can learn.”
  – “The teacher was fun. He played out the characters. He made it so funny and I like it.”

• Negative Teacher Attributes
  – Cranky, mean, picky
  – “She had a hard time and she like brought her problems to school and then if you would say something, she would get mad and everything…[when] she was mad she wouldn’t help us.”
  – “She was so strict that we couldn’t talk in class.”
Orientation and Adjustment Issues

• Desiring breaks
  – No recess
  – Longer lunch
  – “[Elementary school] was better. We had one teacher, recess, less homework, and more projects.”

• Increased responsibility
  – Difficulty organizing assignments and course materials
  – More homework and increased difficulty of work
  – “I used to have like one teacher and now we have like seven teachers and I can’t keep up . . . [in elementary school] we had cubbies and we could put our stuff in there and then I didn’t lose stuff. And now we have lockers and my locker is a mess.”
Adjusting to the Larger School Community

- “School was better [in elementary school]. We had one teacher, recess, less homework, and more projects.”
- “Kids didn’t actually say racist stuff in elementary school.”
- “[There were people] who wanted to fight me.”

Difficulty Asserting Needs

- Students seemed to want teachers to understand their needs and to work towards helping them feel comfortable and successful in school
  - Students expected teachers to reach out in warmth and helpfulness
- Students did not identify and express their needs through appropriate assertiveness
- Students appeared to choose to act out or skip class
Home Life

• Videogames
  – Videogames played a large part in the lives of the participants
    • They wanted to play video games at school

• Homework
  • Participants used peers, siblings, extended family, neighbors to help with homework completion
  • Not common for parents to help because of language issues
  • “Some kids sit next to me [in class] and show me how to do the homework.”
• Researcher Perspective about Parental Availability and Response
  – Difficult for interviewer to contact parents to schedule times to meet with student
    • Difficult to reach parents by phone
    • Limited time available to meet with parents in the home
    • Parents were gracious hosts and expressed appreciation to the researcher for his interest in their family

• Parents as Advocates
  – Students infrequently reported that their parents played an active role in their education.
  – Two parents had taken a proactive approach by problem solving with teachers, which resolved the problems.
Limitations

• Interviewer lenses
• SSBD with Latino students
• Most of the major themes and concerns are not distinct to Latino students
  – Students prefer active and engaging teachers
  – Peers provide support during this developmental period
Discussion

- How can future research consider ethnicity in designing effective screening measures and processes?

- How can practitioners use culturally sensitive screening measures and processes, given the emerging research that is available?
Gender Differences and Similarities in a Screening Process for Emotional and Behavioral Risk in Secondary Schools

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Hilda Sabbah, PhD
Michael J. Richardson, B.S
Benjamin J. Young, B.S.
K. Richard Young, PhD

This portion of the presentation was presented at the PBS Chicago 2008 Conference
Screening in Secondary Schools

- Few validated processes for screening during this transitional developmental phase

- Preliminary evidence for using the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) in early secondary settings
  - See Caldarella, et al. (2008)
Research Question

For early middle and junior high school students, what are the gender differences and similarities in a teacher nomination and multi-gated screening process for students at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders?
METHOD
Setting & Participants

Five schools
three middle schools and two junior high schools in suburban and rural areas

- 15,932 students in 6th through 9th grade
- 51.8% students were male
- 91.1% Caucasian, 6.5% Hispanic
- 27.7% students at these schools qualified for free or reduced lunch

Three year duration of screening 1065 nominations

- 77.4% students were male
- 89% Caucasian, 8.1% Hispanic
- 40.9% nominated students qualified for free or reduced lunch
Instrument

The Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) by Walker and Severson, 1992

Developed for use in elementary schools

Preliminary evidence for use in junior high and middle schools (Caldarella, et al., 2008)
RESULTS
Significantly more males than females nominated by teachers

• From a sample of 15,932 nominated over a three year period
  – 796 (5%) males nominated
  – 269 (2%) females nominated

• The average ratio (across the three years) of males to females nominated was approximately
  – 5:1 for externalizing behaviors
  – 2:1 for internalizing behaviors
  – 3:1 for total male and female students nominated
Reliability Analyses

- Chronbach’s Alpha calculated for each of the SSBD Stage Two scales:
  - Internalizing and Externalizing Critical Events Subscales
  - Adaptive Scale and the Maladaptive Scale

- The Internalizing Critical Events Subscale consisted of only five items; reliability coefficients for this scale were consistently lower than for the other scales (alphas = .44 - .62)

- Reliability coefficients on the Adaptive and Maladaptive scores were comparable for males and females, as determined by Fisher’s z-tests
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## Stage Two Means (St. dev.)

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<td>38.52 (8.58)</td>
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<td>Year 3 (n=131)</td>
<td>3.94 (2.75)</td>
<td>37.46 (9.34)</td>
<td>23.54 (10.56)</td>
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A MANOVA was conducted for each year to examine gender, reduced lunch, and the internalizing/externalizing dimension at SSBD Stage One as independent variables, and the three SSBD Stage Two scales as dependent variables.

- Multivariate Tests:
  - There were no significant multivariate interactions except between gender and the internalizing/externalizing dimension for year three (p < .05).
  - Significant main effects were found for all three independent variables in the first year (Gender & Reduced Lunch, p < .05; Internalizing/Externalizing, p < .001).
  - Main effects for Gender and Internalizing/Externalizing remained significant in subsequent years (p < .01)
  - No significant main effects for reduced lunch were found in year two or three
Univariate Tests

• The gender by internalizing/externalizing interaction was significant only for the Maladaptive scale in the third year ($p < .01$).

• The internalizing/externalizing dimension yielded the largest F value across years and for all three dependent variables ($p < .01$).

• Gender yielded statistically significant F values for the Adaptive scores across all three years ($p < .01$).

• Reduced lunch yielded a significant F value for the Critical Events scale during the first year ($p < .05$).
## Univariate Analysis

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<tr>
<td>Int./Ext.</td>
<td>11.09**</td>
<td>49.02***</td>
<td>375.26***</td>
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*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
ANOVA conducted with post hoc Tukey’s tests

- Statistically significant differences between externalizing males and internalizing females across the three years and for Critical Events, Adaptive, and Maladaptive scores ($p < .05$)

- Statistically significant differences between externalizing females and internalizing males, primarily on the Maladaptive scores ($p < .001$)
Mean Differences between Students Nominated with Externalizing and Internalizing Behaviors

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* P < .05, **P < .01, ***P < .001
Internalizing and Externalizing Differences and Similarities

- Statistically significant differences between internalizing females and externalizing females, and internalizing males and externalizing males ($p < .05$)

- The within gender differences were found across the three years on Maladaptive scores and Adaptive scores
DISCUSSION
Nomination Process

• The most striking finding appears to be the disproportionate number of males in the nomination pool
  – Teachers nominated almost three times as many male students as female students across the internalizing and externalizing domains
  – Surprisingly, males were more likely than females to be nominated as internalizers, which contradicts the traditional view of males as externalizers and females as internalizers

• Findings may indicate that this educational setting facilitated display of at-risk behaviors more frequently in males than in females
Psychometric Characteristics

- The SSBD Stage Two scores appeared comparatively reliable for both genders, implying preliminary, but limited, support for an important psychometric strength of the SSBD when used with adolescents.

- Female students received higher scores on the Adaptive Scale at Stage Two.
Demographic Influences

• The only demographic factor that seemed to influence teacher nomination was poverty, as measured by free or reduced lunch status, although this did not vary by gender

  – This finding may imply that students who experience poverty, as measured by free/reduced lunch status, may have additional stressors or factors that increase the likelihood that teachers will view their behaviors as problematic.

• Hispanic students were not more likely than others to be nominated by teachers

  – The number of Hispanic students nominated and in the larger school population was relatively small
  – The relative homogeneity of the population may have limited the ability to detect differences in nomination due to ethnicity
Hypotheses about Results

- The at-risk behaviors among females may not have been captured in this screening process.

- Educational settings may elicit maladaptive behaviors in males.

- Females’ adaptive behaviors may mask some of their at-risk behaviors.
Limitations

• Homogeneity of population and limited geographical area

• The SSBD process was specifically developed for use in elementary populations
  – Some items developmentally inappropriate
  – Validity evidence for using this adapted form of this measure in secondary schools is still limited
Discussion Questions

- How can future research consider gender and ethnicity in designing effective screening measures and processes?

- How can practitioners use culturally sensitive screening measures and processes, given the emerging research that is available?
References

