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Impact of educational environment on female International college students

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Abstract

This study examined the educational experiences of 76 female International students and their psychological well-being. Undergraduates had fewer nonpersistence decisions than their graduate counterparts. However, cultural congruity predicted well-being for undergraduates whereas academic nonpersistence decisions predicted well-being for graduate students.

International Students

- International students and scholars have participated in the U.S. educational system for the last five decades (American Immigration Law Foundation, 2003), during which time their representation has increased over the last twenty years (Walker, 2000).
 - International students account for less than 2% of all nonimmigrant visitors, with a 1000 or more students attending 150 different universities, respectively (American Immigration Law Foundation).
 - International students comprise 3.49% of all enrollment in higher education; 2.24% of undergraduate higher education, and 12.4% of graduate enrollment.
 - Among doctorates awarded in specific fields in 1999, International students were awarded 41.1% of doctorates in engineering; 33.9% in physical sciences; 26.2% in business, and 26% in life sciences.
- In the 1997-1998 academic year, International students represented 3.3% of all bachelor degrees awarded; 12.5% of all master's degree awarded; and 24.6% of all doctorates awarded.
 - Asian students comprise more than half (56%), with majority of Asian students coming from China (10.8%) and India (11.5%) (American Immigration Law Foundation, 2003).
- Coming from cultural, racial, and ethnic contexts that are different from the university, students are challenged to navigate environments that is culturally-incongruent with their own values (Gloria, & Kurpius-Robinson, 1996) and behaviors (Pedersen, 1991; Spradley & Phillips, 1972).
- International students contend with
 - transitional issues (Tillman, 1999)
 - subsequent loss of natural support systems (Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000)
 - different classroom culture and student-teacher relationship (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Swagler, 2003)
 - language concerns (Tillman, 1999; Ying, 2002)
 - negative perceptions and discrimination (Pedersen, 1991)
 - subsequent psychological distress
 - contexts that focus on the individual versus the collective (Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Yeh, 2002)

- Cultural shifts disconnect students from their cultures and challenge their adjustment process and ultimate well-being (Misra et al., 2003; Sandhu, 1994).
- A paucity of research addresses international students
 - no empirical information on educational experiences and cultural fit within the academic environment, impact on academic persistence decisions, and psychological well-being
- Increased presence of female International students (Walker, 2000)
 - Female International students respond to stress differently and are more prone to negative stress reaction than their male counterparts (Misra, Crist, &Burant, 2003).
 - Literature has yet to address needs and experiences of females.

Purpose of the Study

- Guiding question: To examine female international students' educational experiences and their psychological well-being
- Questions:
 - To examine differences in awareness of race/ethnicity, being mentored, cultural congruity, perception of university environment, academic persistence decision, and psychological well-being by class standing (undergraduate / graduate)
 - To determine the extent to which these educational variables accounted for psychological well-being
 - To assess for differences in the strengths of relationships by class standing

Setting and Procedure

- Study conducted at large predominantly White Midwestern Research I Institution
- Institutional Review Board approval secured
- Recruitment at International student based organizations and events
 - Nonparametric sampling method used to access International student population
- Study overview and specific directions provided for students
- No incentive provided
- 30 minutes to complete survey
- Researcher collected completed survey at time of administration
- ~ 80% response rate

Student Participants

- 76 Female International Students
- Race
 - 69Asians
 - 4 Black
 - 2 Latino/a
 - 1 Caucasian
- Class Standing
 - 24 undergraduates
 - 4 Freshman
 - 3 Sophomores
 - 5 Juniors
 - 12 Seniors
 - 51 graduates
 - 1 missing

- Mean GPA = 3.69 (*SD* = .25)
 - range = 3.00 to 4.00
- Mean age = 25.64 (*SD* = 5.0)
 - range = 19 to 41 yrs old
- Length of time in U.S.
 - Mean = 3.86 (*SD* = 3.27)
 - Range = .50 to 14 yrs
- 52% planned to return immediately or within 2 years after graduation
 - 25% seeking residency after graduation
- Area of Study
 - 30.3% Letters and Science
 - 23.7% Engineering
 - 21.1% Agriculture / Life Sciences
 - 7.9% Education
 - 6.6% Business
 - 5.3% Law
 - 5.3% Other

Instruments

Instruments (Counterbalanced)	Construct Measured	# of Items	Likert-Type Scale	Alpha
Demographic Sheet (always placed first)	General and educational items	13	~	~
Awareness of Race/Ethnicity in the University Environment (ARUE) Researcher developed	Awareness of race and ethnicity in university environment	7	1 (<i>Never</i>) 4 (<i>Always</i>)	.88
Mentoring Scale (MS) (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999)	Perceptions of being mentored	6	1 (<i>Strongly Disagree</i>) 5 (<i>Strongly Agree</i>)	.86
University Environment Scale (UES) (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996)	Perceptions of the university environment	14	1 (<i>Not at all</i>) 7 (<i>Very True</i>)	.78
Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996)	Congruity b/w personal values and university's values	13	1 (<i>Not at all</i>) 7 (<i>Very True</i>)	.82
Persistence Voluntary Dropout Decisions Scale (PVDDS) Pascarella & Terenzini (1980)	Academic nonpersistence decisions of college students	30	1 (<i>Strong Disagree</i>) 5 (<i>Strongly Agree</i>)	.84
Scales for Psychological Well- being-Short Form (SPWB) (Ryff, 1989)	Psychological well-being	20	1 (<i>Strongly Disagree</i>) 6 (<i>Strongly Agree</i>)	.86

Results

- ANOVA ~ No differences by class standing (undergraduate and graduate) for study variables
 - With the exception of PVDD, where undergraduate had significantly fewer nonpersistence decisions than graduates
- **Stepwise Regressions ~**
 - Undergraduate
 - $F(1,22) = 8.81, p \leq .01$
 - CCS, $\beta = .54, t = 2.97, p \leq .01$
 - 29% of variance of WB

 - Graduate
 - $F(1,47) = 9.26, p \leq .01$
 - PVDD, $\beta = .41, t = 3.04, p \leq .01$
 - 15% of variance of WB
- **Correlations ~**
 - Undergraduate
 - Correlations with WB
 - ARUE, $-.09, p > .05$
 - MS, $.29, p > .05$
 - CCS, $.54, p \leq .01$
 - UES, $.14, p > .05$
 - PVDD, $.51, p \leq .01$

 - Graduate
 - Correlations with WB
 - ARUE, $-.01, p > .05$
 - MS, $.34, p < .01$
 - CCS, $.26, p \leq .05$
 - UES, $.28, p \leq .05$
 - PVDD, $.41, p \leq .01$
- **r to z transformations ~**
 - No differences in strengths of relationships by class standing

Discussion of Findings

- Despite previous research indicating differences in educational experiences by class standing (undergraduate / graduate), differences were not revealed for how female International students perceived themselves within the environment.
 - Navigating new contexts and cultures are common concerns for all International Students (Gloria, & Kurpius-Robinson, 1996) and behaviors (Pedersen, 1991).
- All International students are faced with their race/ethnicity as a salient factor, being mentored, cultural incongruity, and negotiating the university environment
- Finding evidenced by no differences in strengths of relationships for the study's variables

- Class standing may not be a delineating factor in the experiences for International female students
- Graduate students had more nonpersistence decisions (i.e., more likely to drop out) than their undergraduate counterparts.
 - Higher expectations from others and from self may influence decisions
 - Increased focus on academic achievement
- Cultural congruity was predictive of psychological well-being for undergraduates, whereas academic nonpersistence decisions was predictive of psychological well-being for graduates.
 - In light of developmental processes:
- undergraduates may find being part of the larger environment as more essential to their sense of well-being
 - as increased cultural congruity was associated with increased sense of well-being
 - academic nonpersistence decisions was related but not predictive
- graduates may experience their academic performance as integral to their sense of well-being
 - primary focus for International graduate students is to earn an education
 - as fewer nonpersistence decisions was related to increase sense of well-being
 - experience of environment related to nonpersistence decisions, however not directly predictive of their sense of well-being

Limitations ~ Future Research

- Small sample size primarily comprised of Asian students ~ Have equal representation of other races/ethnicities and/or conduct race/ethnic specific study
- Rely on self-report survey-based information ~ Conduct interviews to secure in depth information about educational experiences
- Assessment of stress not included for gender specific issues ~ Include assessment of the degree to which different social supports buffer stress for female international students
- Construct validity of study variables ~ Norm scale with different international student populations
 - expand psychological well-being to include issues of spirituality

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