

Latina/o Undergraduates' Psychosociocultural Processes of Cultural Congruity

Barbara Y. Escobar, B.A.
University of California-Irvine

Jeanett Castellanos, Ph.D.
University of California-Irvine

Alberta M. Gloria, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Abstract

Latina/os have long had a history of prematurely leaving the educational pipeline and being underrepresented in higher education. Numerous factors contribute to their lack of representation including cognitive and non-cognitive considerations. Emphasizing non-cognitive concerns, elements of university context, self-beliefs, access to social supports, and integration of culture are consistently identified as salient considerations for students' academic nonpersistence decisions. In particular, cultural congruity for Latina/o students has consistently evidenced a salient role in understanding psychological well-being and their decision to persist academically. This study explored specifically the different aspects and processes which promote cultural congruity for Latina/o undergraduates. Using a semi-structure interview and situational Latina/o student vignette, this study investigated the mechanisms and venues by which 28 Latina/o undergraduates engendered their sense of cultural congruity. Implications for research and practice emphasize the importance of enhancing opportunities to practice home values and create spaces to engage university values.

Latina/os in Higher Education

- Enrollment projected to increase more than any other racial/ethnic group between 2006 and 2017 (NCES, 2008)
- A 372% increase (353,000 to 1,667,000) of Latina/o students enrolled in higher education from 1976 to 2004; yet, in 2007 comprised only 11% of all students in higher education (NCES, 2007)
- Of the 1,524,092 bachelor's degrees conferred in 2006, Latina/os earned 114,936 or approximately 7.5% (NCES, 2008)
- Latina/o students' educational experiences fraught with dimensionalized barriers and multi-faceted challenges hindering their persistence, retention, and graduation (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006)
- Students' ability to negotiate and navigate cultural differences influences their educational satisfaction and perceived "micro-successes" (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008)

Psychosociocultural (PSC) Model of Academic Persistence

- Psychosociocultural framework a meta-model in which psychological, social, and cultural dimensions are emphasized to understand the "whole" student within the context of the university (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000)
- Empirically-validated with different Latina/o undergraduate and college populations (e.g., Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, in press) as well other students of color (e.g., Sengkhamee et al., 2009; Lin & Gloria, 2009)

Cultural Congruity and Latina/o Undergraduates

- Defined as the perceived match, fit, or congruence between students' personal/cultural and institutional values (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996; Castellanos & Gloria, 2008)
- Higher cultural congruity associated with increased:
 - positive perceptions of university environment for Latina/o undergraduates (Gloria, Castellanos, Rosales, & Lopez, 2005; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996)
 - psychological well-being for Latina (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005) and Latino (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, in press) undergraduates
 - sense of college and educational self-efficacy (Gloria, Castellanos, Rosales, & Lopez, 2005)
 - perceptions of being mentored for first-year Latina undergraduates (Bordes & Arredondo, 2007)
 - sense of spiritual groundedness (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008)
 - academic nonpersistence decisions for Latina/o undergraduates (Gloria, Castellanos, Rosales, & Lopez, 2005)

Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association
6-9 August 2009, Toronto, Canada

Please do not quote or cite without permission of authors
Contact Alberta M. Gloria (agloria@education.wisc.edu) or Jeanett Castellanos (castellj@uci.edu)

- “Educational code-switching” and active approaches to balance home and school values more frequent when lower sense of congruity experienced (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2006)

Purpose of the Study

To examine the different venues and processes by which Latina/o undergraduates experience and promote a sense of cultural congruity in higher education. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews and use of a commonly-described scenario for Latina/o undergraduates’ themes for development and maintenance of cultural congruity were explored.

Settings and Procedures

- IRB-approved study conducted at mid-size west Coast Research Institution
- Latina/os comprise 14% of student population
- Recruitment from Latina/o-based organizations and classes
- \$5 gift card for local restaurant
- Demographic sheet completed prior to interviews
- 45 to 90 minutes to complete interviews
- Interviews audio-taped
- Sex of student scenario matched participants

Study Participants

Sex	Class Standing	Affiliated Departments
14 Females	5 Freshmen	4 Arts
14 Males	7 Sophomores	1 Biological Sciences
	6 Juniors	2 Engineering
Age	5 Seniors	5 Humanities
18 to 28 years	5 Fifth-year Seniors	1 Computer Sciences
$M = 21.40 (SD = 2.12)$		7 Social Ecology
	Generation Level	8 Social Sciences
Ethnicity	1 First-generation	17 students reported their culture plays role in their education
20 Mexican American	23 Second-generation	
4 Chicano/a	2 Third-generation	
2 Central American	1 Fourth-generation	
1 Puerto Rican	1 Fifth-generation	All students non-transfers
1 Multicultural		

Interview Protocol and Latina/o Student Scenario

Interview Questions (selected):

What is your understanding of cultural congruity as you experience the university environment?

- *Psychological:* How do you navigate your feelings (in relation to perception of the university environment) to maintain/preserve your cultural rootedness?
- *Social:* What social systems support your cultural practices and beliefs as a student in college?
- *Cultural:* What practices do you engage in to maintain your culture as a college student?

Vignette Questions:

What would you suggest that Pilar/Jesus do to navigate this situation?

- *Psychological:* What impact do you think or feel that this situation has on Pilar’s/Jesus’ belief that s/he should stay or belong in school?
- *Social:* Given this scenario, who do you think Pilar/Jesus should seek out or get support from to manage the situation?
- *Cultural:* What specific practices might you suggest Pilar/Jesus engage in to keep her/himself “rooted” to manage the situation?

Latina/o Student Scenario

Pilar/Jesus, the first in her/his family to go to college, has been taught by her/his *familia* the value of *respeto* (respect) and *simpatía* (harmonious relationships) in her/his interpersonal interactions, in particular with her/his elders. For example, Pilar's/Jesus' *abuelita* has taught her that s/he should listen fully and not openly contradict others as part of her/his respectful interactions. Pilar's *abuelita* has stressed such interpersonal interactions as a reflection of their family and as a well-educated daughter/son.

In one of her/his classes, Pilar's/Jesus' instructor indicated that a large portion of students' grades would be based on how they challenge him and their peer colleagues regarding class concepts. The students openly "argue" with each other and the instructor, talking over one other, and often interrupting each other.

Narrative Analyses

- Interviews analyzed using LeCompte and Preissle's (1993) multi-step approach
- Narratives coded line-by-line for emergent themes and sub-themes within and between interviews
- Coding team individually coded themes and reached consensus for themes together
- Themes for interviews and student scenario addressed simultaneously

Emergent Themes

Psychological

- Implementation of value of *acomodarse* (accommodating) to be flexible cognitively and behaviorally to manage duality of values and interactions – "Do what you gotta do"
- Realize learning others' perspectives part of educational process – *El valor de entendernos* (The value of understanding each other)
- Allowing transformations through growing pains - *No hay mal que por bien no venga* (From all bad comes good)
- Here to represent – "I'm not the 'stereotypical' Latina/o you think I am"

Social

- *Algo de nada* (Create something out of nothing) - Network systems and "academic family"
- Find and/or engage others with shared values, experiences, and identity level (student organizations, friends, faculty) to gain sense of cultural validation – *Yo en it* (Seeing the me in you)

Cultural

- Recognition that being in higher education means having to live and balance "*dos mundos diferentes*" (two different worlds)
- Engage in activities with conscious intent to strengthen ties to culture (attend mass, speak Spanish or Spanglish, cook/eat ethnic-specific foods, participate in Latina/o-focused programming or events) – *Haciendo cultura* (Doing culture)
- Find off-campus spaces that reflect culture – *Me voy pa' el barrio* (I'm off to the barrio)
- Expression of culture through academics (major chosen, classes taken, papers written, research conducted) – Academic border crossers

Discussion and Implications

- Instillation of Latina/o values to facilitate cognitive and behavioral flexibility critical to navigate duality of values allowing students to gain perspective and learn about others
 - Emphasis of strength of values and other-perspective taking allows knowledge of self and culture, underscoring wholistic purpose of being in higher education
- Creation of “academic family” and social networks provide value-based systems of connection and validation
 - Prompting students to identify and engage their “academic family” regularly can ensure they have venues to be culturally reflected, reinforcing and validating culture.
- Students conscious of need to pursue activities and value-centered interactions to connect them to their culture and acknowledge a potential “loss of cultural self” should they not
 - Rethink ways in which Latina/o-focused events and academics (e.g., major, classes) are means for students to connect to campus rather than separate from it

Limitations ~ Future Research

- Incident for vignette specific to cultural values which likely varied for students based on level of acculturation and enculturation ~ Implement study in which development of common educational cultural incongruity incidents are identified, grouped, and validated as core concerns
- Cross-sectional data ~ Develop “diary” study in which students identify facilitative or hindering processes, interactions, or events to one’s sense of cultural congruity for extended time (e.g., 2 weeks, 1 semester)
- Access to family (e.g., living with family, out-of-state student) and/or level of “college-knowledge” (e.g., first in family to go to college, older sibling in college) may have influenced preparation for incongruous interactions or approaches to maintain sense of cultural congruity ~ Inclusion of these moderating variables needed to gain nuanced and dimensioned understanding of cultural congruity