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Coping and spirituality: Facilitating college adjustment for Latina undergraduates

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Abstract

This study examined how acculturation, cultural fit, and coping responses, in particular spirituality, predict college adjustment for 126 Latina undergraduate students from two settings (Midwestern and West Coast universities). Comprised primarily of Mexican American/Chicanas who were motivated to earn advanced educational degrees and most frequently used planned action coping responses to manage their educational experiences, each of the study's variables together accounted for 46% of the variance of college adjustment. Cultural congruity and perception of the university environment (cultural fit cluster) together accounted for 26% of the variance, with cultural congruity the strongest predictor. The relationship of problem-focused coping and college adjustment was significantly stronger for lower division than upper division students, with differences in both problem- and emotion-focused coping and spirituality by university context. Finally, an interaction of generation and site was indicated for orientation to Mexican values was yielded. Each of the study's findings are discussed along with limitations, future research directions, and implications for university personnel working with Latina undergraduates.

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Latinas in Higher Education

- Underrepresented in higher education (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002)
 - Latina attrition rate significantly higher than any other group (Gloria, 1999)
 - Latinas enter at higher rate than Latinos but have higher dropout rates (Cardoza, 1991)
- Issues that may contribute to increased “drop-out”:
 - Managing family responsibilities (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004; Hernandez, 2000)
 - Incongruence of cultural values of the university environment (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996)
 - Gender role expectations and stereotypes (Rodriguez et al., 2000)
 - Unwelcoming university environment (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997)

Purpose of Study

To examine the differences in and relationship of acculturation, cultural fit, and coping mechanisms to college adjustment of Latina undergraduates

- Examine differences in the study’s variables by university setting (i.e., Site 1 and Site 2), class standing (i.e., lower and upper division) and generation (i.e., first, second, and third plus)
- Determine the predictive ability of acculturation, perception of the university environment, cultural congruity, problem and emotion-focused coping, and the specific coping mechanism of spirituality to college adjustment
- Explore the interrelationships and strengths of relationships (i.e., differences of coefficients) for each of the study’s variables by site, class standing, and generation

Setting and Study Procedure

- Conducted at two Research Type I institutions
 - Site 1 (West Coast university)
 - ~24,000 students, 57.2% REM, 10% Latina/o
 - Site 2 (Midwestern university)
 - ~42,000 students, 10% REM, 2.6% Latina/o
- Institutional Review Board approved study
- Participants recruited from Latina/o student organizations and sororities
- 30-45 minutes to complete survey
- No incentive or remuneration provided
- Surveys returned at time of completion or via intercampus mail
- Response rate:
 - Site 1: 51% (118 of 230 surveys) & Site 2: 63% (64 of 102 surveys)

Student Participants

124 Latina undergraduates

- Site 1 = 90 (72.6%)
- Site 2 = 34 (27.4%)

Average age: 21.33 ($SD = 2.15$)

- o Range: 18 to 27

Mean GPA: 3.10 ($SD = .44$)

- o Range: 2.0 – 4.0

Generation Level

- o 18 - 1st generation (15.1%)
- o 52 - 2nd generation (43.7%)
- o 24 - 3rd generation (20.2%)
- o 20 - 4th generation (16.8%)
- o 5 - 5th generation (4.2%)
- o 5 - Missing

Finance of education

- o 76 part-time work (63.3%)
- o 85 student loans (70.8%)
- o 64 scholarships (53.3%)
- o 55 family support (45.8%)
- o 35 personal savings (29.2%)
- o 8 full-time work (6.7%)

120 reported valuing their education (97.5%)

Instruments

- Counterbalanced to avoid response set
- Internal consistency coefficients ranged from .65 to .90
- Demographic sheet (20 items):
 - Assessed 6 personal, 10 educational, and 4 familial
- Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans-II [*ARSMA-II*, 48 items, $\alpha = .65$ (AOS) and .84 (MOS)]
 - Examines behavioral and affective aspects of acculturation (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995)
 - 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Always*)
- University Environment Scales (*UES*, 14 items, $\alpha = .82$):
 - Measures perception of the university environment (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996)
 - 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*)

- Cultural Congruity Scale (**CCS**, 13 items , $\alpha = .81$):
 - Assesses match or fit of personal and university values (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996)
 - 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree)
- The Student Coping Scale (**SCOPE**, 40 items, $\alpha = .90$ and $.81$)
 - Assesses college student's academic coping responses: specifically emotion-and problem-focused coping (Carver, Sheier & Weintraub, 1989)
 - 1 (*Extremely Uncharacteristic*) to 10 (*Extremely Characteristic*)
- List of Coping Responses (**LCR**, 9 items)
 - Designed to identify coping responses by Latina/o college students (Mena et al., 1987)
 - 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*)
- Human Spirituality Scale (**HS**, 20 items, $\alpha = .88$):
 - Measures spirituality in adults (Wheat, 1991)
 - 1 (*Constantly/Almost Constantly*) to 5 (*Never/Almost Never*)
- College Adjustment Scale (**CAS**, 28 items, $\alpha = .82$)
 - Measures different dimensions of adjustment: social, academic, institutional, and personal (Weber, 2003)
 - 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*)

Results

Frequencies of Coping Responses

- Most frequently used coping responses
 - Actively taking positive planned action (LCR1, 89.4%)
 - Talking with others about the problem (LCR2, 85.2%)
 - Drawing upon past experiences (LCR7, 84.5%)
- Least frequently used coping responses
 - Not to worry about the problem (LCR3, 35.3%)
 - Seeking professional advice (LCR6, 31.4%)
- By site
 - Same pattern of coping responses
 - Site 2 consistently reported higher (LCR1, LCR2, and LCR7) and lower (LCR3, LCR6) coping responses

2x2x3 MANOVA

- Significant main effect for Site
 - [$\lambda = .81$, $F(8, 93) = 2.76$, $p \leq .01$, $\eta^2 = .19$]
 - Site 2 reported higher than Site 1
 - SCOPE-P [$F(1, 112) = 11.25$, $p \leq .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$]
 - SCOPE-E [$F(1, 112) = 8.07$, $p \leq .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$]
 - HS [$F(1, 112) = 7.02$, $p \leq .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$]
- Nonsignificant main effects for Class standing and Generation, $p > .05$
- Significant interaction for site by generation
 - [$\lambda = .73$, $F(16, 186) = 2.00$, $p \leq .05$, $\eta^2 = .15$]

- Second generation Site 1 students higher MOS than third generation Site 2 students
- Third generation Site 2 students higher MOS than second generation Site 1 students

Predicting College Adjustment

- 5-Step Hierarchical Regression [$F(9, 111) = 9.60, p \leq .001$], accounted for 46% of the variance
 - **Step 1:** Site, class, and generation
 - Significant r^2 change of .11, $\Delta F = (3, 108) = 4.30, p \leq .01$
 - Generation ($\beta = .30, t = 3.23, p \leq .01$)
 - **Step 2:** Acculturation
 - Nonsignificant r^2 change of .00, $\Delta F(1, 107) = .21, p > .05$
 - **Step 3:** Cultural Fit (UES and CCS)
 - Significant r^2 change of .28, $\Delta F(2, 105) = 23.40, p \leq .001$
 - UES ($\beta = .25, t = 2.90, p \leq .01$)
 - CCS ($\beta = .38, t = 4.30, p \leq .001$)
 - **Step 4:** Student Coping (SCOPE-P and SCOPE-E)
 - Significant r^2 change of .07, $\Delta F(2, 103) = 7.02, p \leq .001$
 - SCOPE-P ($\beta = .26, t = 2.97, p \leq .01$)
 - **Step 5:** Human Spirituality
 - Nonsignificant r^2 change of .00, $\Delta F(1, 102) = .24, p > .05$

Interrelationships and Strengths of correlations

- Higher CAS significantly and positively correlated with
 - AOS ($r = .32, p \leq .001$)
 - UES ($r = .43, p \leq .001$)
 - CCS ($r = .52, p \leq .001$)
 - SCOPE-P ($r = .42, p \leq .001$)
 - SCOPE-E ($r = .33, p \leq .001$)
 - HS ($r = .27, p \leq .01$)
- MOS nonsignificantly correlated with CAS ($r = .14, p \geq .05$).
- No differences in strengths of relationships by Site and Generation
- By class standing, SCOPE-P and CAS significantly stronger ($z = 2.05, p \leq .05$) for lower division ($r = .67, p \leq .001$) than upper division ($r = .33, p \leq .001$) students

Discussion and Implications

46% of variance of college adjustment predicted by cultural fit and coping responses

- Cultural congruity strongest predictor of college adjustment
 - Consistent with findings that increased congruity related to more positive perception of university environment and lower nonpersistence decisions (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005)
 - **Bridge cultural gap of personal and university values to increase Latina students' adjustment potentially increasing graduation rates**

- Problem-focused coping second strongest predictor of college adjustment
 - Latinas most frequently reported coping responses that were problem-focused
 - Positive planned action (89.4%)
 - Talking with others (85.2%)
 - Drawing upon past experiences (84.5%)
 - Relationship of problem-focused coping response and college adjustment significantly stronger for lower division than upper division
 - Concerns of lower division students may be more practical and daily life management issues than for upper division students
 - Findings consistent with coping responses of Latina undergraduates (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Vázquez, & García-Vázquez, 1995), where coping responses related to college persistence and lower attrition rates (Zea, 1997)
 - **Emphasize problem-focused coping responses, in particular with lower division Latina undergraduates**
- Human spirituality not predictive but positively related to college adjustment
 - Students in low Latina/o/REM context had higher spirituality than did those in high Latina/o/REM context
 - May strive for transcendence to obtain connectedness when lacking support and validation
 - Findings consistent that spirituality is a powerful construct for Latina/os
 - Spirituality can help mollify historical and chronic mistreatment (Cervantes & Parham, 2005), such as university environments
 - **Welcome and incorporate aspects of spirituality into transitional and developmental milestones (e.g., moving away from home) for Latinas' college adjustment**

Limitations ~ Research Directions

- Nonrandom sampling ~ Work with administration and student organizations to identify Latina/o students for participation
- Generalizability limited to Latina students ~ Conduct gender-based studies for Latina/os
- Aggregation of Latina/o ethnicities ~ Conduct within and between group assessments for Latina/os
- Long survey with one scale difficult to distinguish corresponding anchors ~ Use booklet format and ensure attend to aesthetics of survey
- Researcher demographics potential influence on participants survey completion ~ Attend to impact of researcher's demography and modeling within Latina/o community
- Inadequate reliability for AOS ~ Use multiple measures to support or refute relationship of cultural adjustment and Anglo orientation
- Proscribed or traditional notion of spirituality and religion ~ Expand the conceptualization of spirituality to include contemporary and diverse practice and application for Latina/os
- *Human Spirituality Scale (HS)* not validated for Latina/os ~ Additional norming and validation of scales for different Latina/os populations needed

- *College Adjustment Scale (CAS)* may not have sufficiently assessed dimensionalities of adjustment ~ Qualitative study needed to determine ethnic and gender specific concerns

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