

Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association
9 - 13 August 2006 ~ New Orleans, LA

Understanding Latina/o undergraduates' spirituality, coping and college adjustment

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Abstract

This study examined how acculturation, cultural fit, and coping responses, in particular spirituality, predicted college adjustment for 144 Latina/o undergraduates at a Midwestern university. Students were U.S. born, high-achieving Mexican Americans who were motivated to earn advanced educational degrees. Cultural fit, perception of the university, and problem- and emotion-focused coping responses were the strongest predictors of college adjustment accounting for 34% of the variance. Latina/os most frequently reported taking positive planned action, drawing upon past experiences, and talking with others about the problem as coping responses. Differences by gender, class standing, and generation were yielded for the study's variables; however, no differences in strengths of relationships were found. Study results are discussed along with limitations, future research directions, and implications for university personnel working with Latina/o undergraduates.

Latina/os in Higher Education

- Underrepresented in higher education (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002)
 - Latina/os are the least educated group in the U.S. (Pew Hispanic Center Fact Sheet, 2002)
 - Educational attainment varies by Latina/o ethnic group (Gloria, Ruiz, & Castillo, 2004; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004) with Mexican Americans having the lowest degree conferral rates

- Factors that contribute to “drop-out” or “stop-out”
 - Mismatch of values between student and educational setting (i.e., cultural incongruity) leading to stress, alienation, sense of normlessness, and isolation (Castellanos, Gloria & Kamimura, 2006; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005)
 - Decreased academic self-efficacy due to lack of cultural and personal validation, mentorship, and hostile environment (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Castellanos & Jones, 2003)

- Latina/os use various coping strategies to negotiate their educational experiences (Zea, 1997)
 - Connect with peers and mentors for social support (Capello, 1994; Gloria, 1997)
 - Most often use planned positive action (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005)
 - Call upon higher powers to manage educational challenges (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003)
 - Use of religion and spirituality to positively influence college/university persistence (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Castellanos & Gloria, in press)
 - Religiosity positively affects academic growth and persistence (Zern, 1989)
 - Spirituality can be an effective strategy for confronting crisis provoking situations (Gall, Charbonneau, Clark, Grant, Joseph, & Shouldice, 2005)

Purpose of Study

To examine the differences in and relationships of acculturation, cultural fit, and coping responses for Latina/o undergraduates' college adjustment by gender, class standing, and generation

- Examine differences in the study's variables by gender, 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 to college adjustment by gender, class standing, and generation

Setting and Study Procedure

- Institutional Review Board approved study conducted at a Midwestern research university
 - ~42,000 students, 10% Racial Ethnic Minorities, 2.6% Latina/o
- Students recruited from Latina/o student organizations, cultural events, and sororities and a fraternity
- 30-45 minutes to complete survey
- No incentive or remuneration provided
- Surveys returned at time of completion or via inter-campus mail
- 67% response rate (147 of 220 surveys)

Student Participants

Gender			Age		G.P.A	
<i>n</i>	-----	%	<i>M</i>	-----	<i>M</i>	-----
91	Females	63.6	<i>SD</i>	20.29	<i>SD</i>	3.10
52	Males	36.4	Range	1.90	Range	0.44
144	<i>Total</i>			17 to 27		2.0 - 4.0

Generation			Ethnicity		
<i>n</i>	-----	%	<i>n</i>	-----	%
28	1 st	19.6	71	Mexican Americans	49.7
54	2 nd	37.8	22	Puerto Ricans	15.4
37	3 rd	25.9	15	South Americans	10.5
12	4 th	8.4	15	Multiracial	10.5
12	5 th	8.4	12	Central Americans	8.4
1	Missing	--	5	Other	3.5
			3	Cuban Americans	2.1
			1	Missing	--

Finance of Education			Familial Education		
<i>n</i>	-----	%	<i>n</i>	-----	%
89	Part-time work	61.8	103	Either parent attended college	79.8
88	Scholarships	61.1	75	Had siblings who attended college	60
87	Student loans	60.4			
58	Family support	40.3			
29	Personal savings	13.2			
7	Full-time work	4.9			

Class Standing		
<i>n</i>	-----	%
42	Freshmen	29.2
23	Sophomores	16.0
40	Juniors	27.7
15	Seniors	10.4
24	5 th year Seniors	17.7

- 103 aspired for a graduate or professional degree (72%)
- 134 reported valuing their education (93.7%)

Instruments

- Counterbalanced to avoid response set
- Internal consistency coefficients ranged from .73 to .90

Instrument	Authors	Construct Measured	Likert-Scale	# of Items	Alpha
Demographic Sheet	Researcher Developed	Background info, 6 personal 10 educational, and 4 familial items	_____	20	_____
Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans-II (<i>ARSMA-II</i>)	Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995	Behavioral and affective aspects of acculturation	1 (<i>Not at all</i>) to 5 (<i>Always</i>)	48	.73(AOS) .87 (MOS)
University Environment Scales (<i>UES</i>)	Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996	Perception of the university environment	1 (<i>Strongly Disagree</i>) to 4 (<i>Strongly Agree</i>)	14	.90
Cultural Congruity Scale (<i>CCS</i>)	Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996	Match or fit of personal and university values	1 (<i>Strongly Disagree</i>) to 4 (<i>Strongly Agree</i>)	11	.90
Student Coping Scale (<i>SCOPE</i>)	Carver, Sheier & Weintraub, 1989	College student's academic coping responses: specifically problem-and emotion-focused coping	1 (<i>Extremely Uncharacteristic</i>) to 10 (<i>Extremely Characteristic</i>)	29	.88 (SCOPE-P) .85 (SCOPE-E)
List of Coping Responses (<i>LCR</i>)	Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987	Designed to identify coping responses by Latina/o college students	1 (<i>Strongly Disagree</i>) to 4 (<i>Strongly Agree</i>)	9	_____
Human Spirituality Scale (<i>HSS</i>)	Wheat, 1991	Spirituality in adults	1 (<i>Constantly/Almost Constantly</i>) to 5 (<i>Never/Almost Never</i>)	20	.89
College Adjustment Scale (<i>CAS</i>)	Kaya & Weber, 2003	Different dimensions of adjustment: social, academic, institutional, and personal	1 (<i>Strongly Disagree</i>) to 7 (<i>Strongly Agree</i>)	28	.82

Results

Frequencies of Coping Responses

- Most frequently used responses:
 - Actively taking positive planned action (LCR1, 96.5%)
 - Drawing upon past experiences (LCR7, 93.7%)
 - Talking with others about the problem (LCR2, 85.3%)
- Least frequently used responses:
 - Not to worry about the problem (LCR3, 41.3%)
 - Seeking professional advice (LCR6, 23.8%)
- Similar results for gender, class standing, and generation

2x2x3 MANOVA

- Significant main effect for **Gender**
 - $[\lambda = .74, F(8, 118) = 5.15, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .26]$
 - Males higher in:
 - UES $[F(1, 125) = 6.24, p \leq .05, \eta^2 = .05]$
 - Females higher in:
 - SCOPE-P $[F(1, 125) = 4.68, p \leq .05, \eta^2 = .04]$
 - SCOPE-E $[F(1, 125) = 24.54, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .16]$
 - MOS $[F(1, 125) = 7.69, p \leq .01, \eta^2 = .06]$
 - HSS $[F(1, 125) = 11.88, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .09]$
- Significant main effect for **Class Standing**
 - $[\lambda = .85, F(8, 118) = 2.59, p \leq .05, \eta^2 = .15]$
 - Lower division students higher in:
 - AOS $[F(1, 125) = 11.22, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .08]$
- Significant main effect for **Generation**
 - $[\lambda = .66, F(16, 236) = 3.36, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .19]$
 - First generation lower from second and third plus:
 - AOS $[F(2, 125) = 3.93, p \leq .05, \eta^2 = .06]$
 - Third generation lower from first and second:
 - MOS $[F(2, 125) = 8.25, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .12]$
 - First generation approaching significance lower from third plus:
 - HSS $[F(2, 125) = 3.25, p = .05, \eta^2 = .05]$

5-Step Hierarchical Regression [$F(9, 136) = 7.24, p \leq .001$]; 34% of the variance

Step 1: Gender, Class Standing, and Generation

Nonsignificant Δr^2 of .01, $\Delta F(3, 133) = .43, p > .05$

Step 2: Acculturation

Significant Δr^2 of .03, $\Delta F(1, 132) = 4.13, p \leq .05$

ACC ($\beta = .19, t = 2.30, p \leq .05$)

Step 3: Cultural Fit (CCS and UES)

Significant Δr^2 of .15, $\Delta F(2, 130) = 11.91, p \leq .001$

CCS ($\beta = .24, t = 1.90, p = .06$)

UES ($\beta = .26, t = 1.91, p = .06$)

Step 4: Student Coping (SCOPE-P and SCOPE-E)

Significant Δr^2 of .14, $\Delta F(2, 128) = 13.61, p \leq .001$

SCOPE-P ($\beta = .19, t = 2.25, p \leq .05$)

SCOPE-E ($\beta = .31, t = 3.33, p \leq .001$)

Step 5: Human Spirituality

Nonsignificant Δr^2 change of .01, $\Delta F(1, 127) = 1.64, p > .05$

Interrelationships and Strengths of Correlations

Higher CAS significantly and positively correlated with:

- AOS ($r = .27, p \leq .001$)
- UES ($r = .37, p \leq .001$)
- CCS ($r = .40, p \leq .001$)
- SCOPE-P ($r = .29, p \leq .001$)
- SCOPE-E ($r = .24, p \leq .05$)

No differences in strengths of relationships by gender, class standing, or generation

Discussion and Implications

Overall model accounted for 34% of variance of college adjustment

- Cultural fit and coping responses were strongest predictors
 - Consistent with findings that increased congruity is 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/o students' adjustment potentially increasing graduation rates
- Emotion-focused coping stronger predictor than problem-focused coping
 - Latinas use problem-and emotion-focused coping more than Latinos
 - Gender role expectations and stereotypes (Rodriguez, A.L., Guido-DiBrito, R., Torres, V., & Talbot, D, 2000) and managing family responsibilities (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004) may explain why Latinas tend to use problem-and emotion focus coping responses more than Latinos
 - Create more opportunities for Latinos to express emotion in a culturally-appropriate atmosphere (i.e., Latino Men's Group) and continue validating Latinas expression of emotion
 - Recommend advisors to be more attuned to the feelings of their students
- Acculturation is statistically (but not practically) significant predictor of college adjustment
 - Anglo-orientation positively related to college adjustment
 - Important to understand university values
 - No need to push students to assimilate or acculturate
 - Encourage Latina/o students to understand university values while preserving their own cultural values
- Lower division students reported higher Anglo-orientation than upper division students
 - As Latina/os become more educated and are more exposed to Latina/o culture in a higher education setting, they gain a critical consciousness of their cultural background and become less oriented to Anglo culture
 - Introduce Latina/o students to aspects of their culture through academia and social organizations at the start of their academic career to create awareness and positive ethnic identity
- Anglo-Orientation (AOS)/Mexican-Orientation (MOS) result in differences in generation and gender
 - Finding of AOS/MOS by generation supports college adjustment theory
 - Latinas reported higher Mexican-orientation than Latinos
 - Create venues for Latinos to better understand and embrace cultural heritage

- Spirituality not predictive of, yet indirectly related to college adjustment
 - Spirituality related to emotion-focused coping, which in turn predicted college adjustment
 - Latinas reported higher use of spirituality and may be more open to using spirituality for their college adjustment than Latinos (Castellanos & Gloria, in press)
 - 1st generation Latina/os reported lower use of spirituality than 3rd generation
 - As Latina/os remain in the U.S. for longer, possible experience increased stress and heightened awareness of discrimination (Smart & Smart, 1995) and thus may have a greater need for spirituality
 - Advisors should be open to addressing spirituality with Latina/os, but address in a culturally relevant and effective manner
 - Welcome and incorporate aspects of spirituality into transitional and developmental milestones (e.g., moving away from home) for Latina/os' college adjustment

- Most frequently used coping response was talking with others about problems, while least frequently used response was seeking professional advice
 - Promote counseling services that are culturally relevant/sensitive to Latina/o undergraduates as a mechanism to facilitate college adjustment, demystifying the stigma associated with counseling

Limitations ~ Future Research

- Nonrandom sampling ~ Work with administration and student organizations to identify Latina/o students for study participation
- Generalizability limited to Latina/o students involved in Latina/o organizations and cultural programming ~ Collect data from broader sources
- Aggregation of Latina/o ethnicities ~ Conduct within and between group assessments
- Long survey with one scale difficult to distinguish corresponding anchors ~ Use booklet format and ensure to attend to aesthetics of survey
- Researcher demographics potentially influenced survey completion ~ Attend to impact of researcher's demography and modeling within Latina/o community
- Proscribed or traditional notion of spirituality and religion ~ Expand the conceptualization of spirituality to include contemporary and diverse practice and application for Latina/os
- 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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