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### Latina College Students' Attitudes Toward Mental Health Services

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#### Abstract

This study examined cultural orientation (i.e., Anglo-oriented and Mexican-oriented), cultural fit (i.e., cultural congruity and perceptions of the university environment) and attitudes toward seeking mental health services for 121 Latina undergraduates. Main effects for class standing revealed upper division students were more Anglo-oriented and had more positive attitudes toward seeking help than did their lower division counterparts. Anglo-orientation most strongly predicted cultural congruity and perception of the university environment. Cultural fit, however, did not in turn predict attitudes toward counseling.

#### Latinas in Higher Education

- ◆ Latina college students continue to be *invisible* within university settings (Casas & Ponterotto, 1987; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2004) despite:
  - outnumbering their male counterparts in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002),
  - having high academic achievement (Wycoff, 1996),
  - valuing higher education (Rodriguez et al., 2000),
  - aspiring to earn graduate degrees (Gloria et al., 2004)
  
- ◆ Educational experiences include:
  - negotiation of environment that espouses white male middle class orientation which is often unyielding to cultural differences (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004)
  - recipients of unfriendly racial experiences (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), or daily micro-aggressions (Carroll, 1998) decreasing their sense of belonging (Ponterotto, 1990)
  - cultural incongruity or lack of fit with the university setting, and limited social support (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999)
  - decreased academic support from family and university environment (Duarte, 2002; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004)

- lower academic persistence (Rodriguez et al., 2000)
- greater levels of stress and mental health concerns (Duarte, 2003)
- underutilization of professional counseling services (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2004; Gloria et al., 2001)

◆Latinas manage dichotomy of aspiring and excelling academically while experiencing unique educational barriers and stressors, subsequently hindering their educational processes and sense of well-being (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004)

- Latinas who have negotiated the environment are often considered *Veteranas* and show younger students the ropes to navigate educational environment (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000)

◆Adherence to cultural values, or acculturation may permeate aspects of college student life influencing Latinas' interactions and behaviors

- Acculturation influences Latina/o students' use of mental health (Atkinson, Casas, & Abreu, 1992)
- Latina college students' least frequent coping response was seeking professional help (Gloria et al., 2004)

## Purpose

◆Guiding question: What roles do cultural orientation and cultural fit have on the help-seeking attitudes of Latina college students?

- To examine class standing (i.e., upper and lower division) and previous counseling for study's variables
- To assess the degree to which cultural orientation (i.e., Mexican-oriented and Anglo-oriented) influenced cultural fit (i.e., cultural congruity and perception of the university environment), which in turn informed attitudes toward counseling for Latina college students
- Examine the interrelationships of variables by class standing and previous counseling

## Methods and Procedures

- ◆ Institutional Review Board approved study
- ◆ Survey distribution in Latina/o-focused classes and student organizations
- ◆ Instruments counterbalanced with demographic sheet placed first
- ◆ Study conducted at Research Type I institution
  - comprised of 18% Latina/o student population (73% of Mexican heritage)
- ◆ 65% response rate, no incentive provided
- ◆ 10-15 minutes to complete survey

## Student Participants

- ◆ 158 students completed survey
- ◆ Gender
  - 124 females
  - 32 males
  - 2 missing
- ◆ Participant criteria - Latinas undergraduates
  - 121 Latinas included in analyses

- ◆ Ethnicity
  - Mexican American (76.7%)
- ◆ Average age: 21.81 years
  - $SD = 1.84$
  - Range = 18 - 30 years
- ◆ Generation
  - 13 no one in family
  - 82 first-generation
  - 15 second-generation
  - 7 third-generation
  - 2 fourth-generation
  - 2 missing
- ◆ Average grade point = 3.12
  - $SD = .45$
  - Range = 2.00 - 4.00
- ◆ Class standing
  - 10 freshman (8.4%)
  - 24 sophomore (20.2%)
  - 41 juniors (34.5%)
  - 44 seniors (37.0%)
  - 2 missing
- ◆ 22.3% transfer students
- ◆ 76.0% lived off campus

### Instruments

Scale	Construct Measured	# of Items	Likert-Type Scale	$\alpha$
Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA-II; MOS and AOS) (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995)	Adherence to Mexican and Anglo values	(30) 17 13	1 ( <i>Strongly Disagree</i> ) to 5 ( <i>Strongly Agree</i> )	.87  .70
Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996)	Congruity b/w personal values and university's values	13	1 ( <i>Strongly Disagree</i> ) to 4 ( <i>Strongly Agree</i> )	.84
University Environment Scale (UES) (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996)	Perceptions of the university environment	14	1 ( <i>Strongly Disagree</i> ) to 4 ( <i>Strongly Agree</i> )	.73
Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale: Shortened Form (ATSPPHS) (Fisher & Farina, 1995)	Attitudes toward seeking professional help	10	1 ( <i>Disagree</i> ) to 4 ( <i>Agree</i> )	.81

## Results

MANOVA ~ assessment of differences for variables by previous counseling and class standing

- ◆ Significant main effect for class standing
  - ( $\lambda = .84$ ,  $F(5, 91) = 3.54$ ,  $p > .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ )
- ◆ Univariate differences
  - AOS [ $F(1, 95) = 8.63$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ ]
  - ATSPPHS-SF [ $F(1, 95) = 11.46$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ ]
    - upper division students reported being more Anglo-oriented and having more positive attitudes toward seeking help than lower division students

Regression ~ examination of the degree to which cultural orientation predicted cultural fit, which in turn predicted attitudes toward counseling

- ◆ Step 1 – class standing and previous counseling
- ◆ Step 2 – cultural orientation cluster
  - 14% of the variance of CCS [ $\Delta F(2, 95) = 7.76$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ]
    - AOS ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $t = 3.94$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) for CCS
  - 6% of the variance of UES [ $\Delta F(2, 95) = 3.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ]
    - AOS ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $t = 2.13$ ,  $p \leq .05$ )
- ◆ Cultural fit cluster did not significantly account for variance in ATSPPHS-SF

Correlations ~ examine interrelationships of variables

- ◆ AOS and CCS significantly correlated for
  - lower division students ( $r = .42$ )
  - upper division students ( $r = .38$ )
  - No previous counseling ( $r = .46$ )
- ◆ AOS and UES significantly correlated for
  - upper division students ( $r = .30$ )
  - No previous counseling ( $r = .26$ )
- ◆ MOS and UES significantly correlated for
  - Previous counseling ( $r = .43$ )

## Discussion and Implications

- ◆ Upper division Latinas were more Anglo-oriented than lower division Latinas
  - Having spent more time on campus, upper division Latinas may have learned to implement “code-switch” more effectively to cope and navigate the predominantly White institution
  - Pair upper and lower division students (big sister ~ little sister / hermana ~ hermanita) to have students negotiate environment more effectively
- ◆ Upper division Latinas reported more positive attitudes toward counseling than did lower division Latinas
  - May have broader repertoire of coping mechanisms and means to navigate environment in order to get needs met

◆ Cultural orientation (i.e., Anglo-oriented) predicted cultural congruity and perception of the university environment.

- Having working knowledge and ability to code-switch within the environment may provide:
- an increased sense of fit with the university's values
- a more positive perception of the environment as a whole
- MOS did not predict but was related to UES for those who reported previous counseling
- Latino/as often describe *living two separate lives* - - one on campus and one at home (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004)
- In general, Mexican orientation may be overshadowed and not reflected in daily living and university climate experiences, particularly as context continues to be White dominated and unwelcoming of differences
- Those who reported previous counseling may have been encouraged to implement values and behaviors that are more culturally-based (Mexican value oriented) in order to navigate and successfully manage university context and setting (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000)
- Universities need to implement ethnic awareness series addressing cultural adjustment in college

◆ Cultural fit did not predict attitudes toward counseling, as in previous literature for racial and ethnic minority college students (Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001; Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2004)

- Questionable as to whether ATSPPHS-SF scale had construct validity for Latinas
- Counseling and psychotherapy is traditionally individually focused and formal, which is often incongruent with culturally-based interpersonal behaviors and attitudes
- Latinas maybe more likely to seek help from more experienced peers in informal, collaborative, and educationally-supportive way (Gloria, 1999)
- Provide off-site or satellite services and groups that are psychoeducational
- Counseling Center Staff should reconfigure the roles of service providers to include advisors, advocates, consultants, and facilitators of indigenous support systems (Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993)

### **Limitations ~ Future Research**

- ◆ Self-reported data ~ Longitudinal and outcome-based studies needed for Latinas
- ◆ Response from those interested in topic ~ Randomize sample to increase generalizability
- ◆ Atypical university campus ~ Replicate study at PWIs where REM students limited
- ◆ Orientation scales behavior-based ~ Develop and use scales that are value-driven and capture underlying psychological processes and meaning of orientation
- ◆ Construct validity of ATPPHS-SF ~ Validate use of scale with Latinas and other REM groups

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