

Differences in Perception of Barriers in Higher Education and the Completion of a Degree Among Latinos in the U.S.

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Research Questions

- Does acculturation affect perceptions of barriers to college enrollment and the completion of a degree among Latinos in the U.S.?
- Which measures of acculturation: linguistic acculturation, generation status, or time in the U.S., better predict perceiving barriers to college enrollment and the completion of a degree among Latinos ?

Importance of the Study

- This study is important because higher academic achievement, college enrollment, and the completion of a degree are associated with higher socioeconomic status and lower negative health and social problems.
- Results from this study can improve the understanding of Latinos' perceptions of barriers to college enrollment which social workers, in collaboration with K-12 and university educators, policy makers, and families, can use to address these barriers.

How Improving Academic Achievement and the Completion of a Degree Can be Beneficial

■ For the individual:

- Those who earn a bachelor's degree tend to have higher incomes and socioeconomic status than those who do not complete a bachelor's degree

(Johnson, 2006; Segal, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

- Individuals with higher incomes and SES, tend to have fewer negative health and social problems

(National Center for Children in Poverty, 2006; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997) .

How Improving Academic Achievement and the Completion of a Degree Can be Beneficial

■ **For the community and society:**

- A highly educated population often attracts higher paying jobs which can have a positive impact on communities, cities, and states (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2001).
- Latinos with a Bachelor's degree pay nearly twice the federal income taxes of a high school graduate (Robles, 2008).
- Latinos with a professional degree pay six times the federal income taxes of a high school graduate (Robles, 2008).
- Increasing the percentage of Latinos who earn a college degree by 3% would add an additional \$1 billion in tax revenue. Increasing it to the same percentage as Whites who earn a degree, would add an additional \$30 billion in tax revenue (Sorensen, Brewer, Carroll, & Bryton, 1995).

Social Construction Theory

- “Reality” or “truth,” is only the reality and truth that is perceived to exist within that society at that particular time (Burr, 1995).
- Individuals are born into a particular society and culture which teaches them what “reality” is for that culture and society at that point in time. Communities develop their own meanings and “realities” that are based on social interactions and needs (Fredericksen, 2002).

Social Construction Theory

- As a result of differing lived experiences based on individual, family, community, and societal differences, different racial/ethnic groups and those in different socioeconomic groups, view social issues in different ways.

Social Construction Theory

- Differing Perceptions:

- 20% of African-Americans say that African-Americans are better off now than they were 5 years ago compared to 37% of Whites (Pew Research Center, 2007).
- The majority of African-Americans report that African-Americans face discrimination
 - “Almost Always/Frequently”
 - 67%- when applying for a job
 - 65%- when trying to rent an apartment or buy a house
- The majority of Whites report that African-Americans face discrimination
 - “Not often/Hardly Ever”
 - 70%- when applying for a job
 - 58%- when trying to rent an apartment or buy a house (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Social Construction Theory

- Individual, family, and community characteristics can influence life experiences and perceptions about “reality” (Crenshaw, 1995).
- Linguistic acculturation, generational status, time in the U.S., SES, and academic achievement-
 - Are all individual characteristics that contribute to the social construction of the perception of barriers, or lack of barriers, in enrollment in college, and the completion of a degree among Latinos.

Literature Review

- K-12 Latino students tend to have lower grades, lower standardized test scores, and lower high school graduation rates than White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; The College Board, 2007; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004).
- Latino high school graduates are less likely to enroll in college than White students (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2004).
- Latino college students are less likely to earn a bachelor's degree than White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Literature Review

- First generation Latinos and English Language Learners (ELLs):
 - tend to have lower grades and standardized test scores in school and lower college enrollment and graduation rates than 2nd generation and English dominant Latinos
- (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2002; Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Hypotheses

- H1: Controlling for age, gender, SES, and academic achievement, participants with lower levels of acculturation: *linguistic acculturation, generation status, and time in the U.S.*, will perceive more barriers to college enrollment and the completion of a degree than participants with higher levels of acculturation.

Methods

■ **Sample:**

- This study utilized data compiled by the Pew Hispanic Research Center between August 7 and October 15, 2003, from 3,421 adults regarding their attitudes toward education.
- This study included only the 1,508 participants who identified themselves as being of Hispanic or Latino heritage.

Methods

■ **Demographics:**

- Of the 3,421 participants, 1,508 identified themselves as being of Hispanic/Latino heritage.
 - Over 63 percent of the participants who identified themselves as Latino identified themselves as being of Mexican descent.
- 44% of the identified Hispanic/Latinos were male and 56% were female.
- The mean age of the participants was 43.
- 44% of the self identified Hispanic/Latino participants preferred to be interviewed in Spanish.
- 54% had annual family incomes of less than \$50,000.
- 43.9% had a high school diploma/GED or lower.

Methods

- **Measures:**

- **Acculturation**

- ***Linguistic Acculturation-*** factor based on participants' language preference at home, work, media, and for the survey.
 - ***Time in the U.S.-*** based on the participants' self report. *How long have you been in the United States"* (1 = less than a year; 5 = More than 20 years)

Methods

■ Measures Continued:

■ *Generational Status*

- ***First generation:*** refers to immigrants (including Puerto Rican born) now living in the United States.
- ***Second Generation:*** refers to children born in the U.S. of immigrant parents.
- ***Third Generation:*** refers to U.S. born Latinos of U.S. born parents.

Methods

- **Controls:**

- ***Gender***- 0 = Male, 1 = Female
- ***Age*** (18-72)
- ***Academic Achievement*** - dichotomous variable:
 - Some College or Higher=1
 - High School Graduate or Below=0
- ***Socioeconomic Status***- (1-5) from less than \$10,000 a year to over \$100,000 a year.

Methods

- **Measures Continued:**

- ***Perceptions of Higher Education Barriers –***

- The cost of tuition
 - It's important to stay close to the family instead of going away to school.
 - Receiving a poor high school education.
 - Discrimination
 - The need to work and earn money.
 - People feel that they do not need a college degree to be successful.

- *1= Not a Reason, 2= Minor Reason and 3= Major Reason why Latinos do not go to college or fail to finish if they start.*

Analyses

- Multinomial logistic regression is an appropriate statistical analysis when the dependent variable consists of nominal categories (Hamilton, 1998).
- Multinomial logistic regression models were run to examine the likelihood of selecting “major” or “minor” reasons why Latino students do not enroll in college, or fail to finish if they start, compared with the likelihood of selecting “not a reason.”

Results

Reasons Why Latino Students Fail to Enroll in College or Fail to Finish if They Start

<i>Odds Ratios</i>	The Cost of Tuition		Staying Close to Family Instead of Going Away to School		Receiving a Poor High School Education	
	<i>Minor Reason</i>	<i>Major Reason</i>	<i>Minor Reason</i>	<i>Major Reason</i>	<i>Minor Reason</i>	<i>Major Reason</i>
Linguistic Acculturation	1.077	.658*	1.514**	1.008	.906	.717**
1st Generation	1.430	.846	.947	1.349	1.030	1.339
2nd Generation	1.074	1.008	1.055	1.355	1.094	1.286
Time in the U.S.	.872	1.076	.671*	.765	.889	1.143

+ p < .10 * p < .05 ** p < .01 ***p < .001

Controls: Gender, Age, SES, Academic Achievement

Reference Category is: Not a Reason

Reference category for generation status is 3rd Generation

VIF for acculturation variables between 1.026 and 1.753

Reasons Why Latino Students Fail to Enroll in College or Fail to Finish if They Start

<i>Odds Ratios</i>	Discrimination		Need to Work to Earn Money		Don't Need College to Be Successful	
	<i>Minor Reason</i>	<i>Major Reason</i>	<i>Minor Reason</i>	<i>Major Reason</i>	<i>Minor Reason</i>	<i>Major Reason</i>
Linguistic Acculturation	1.832***	1.461***	1.224	.861	1.055	1.113
1st Generation	1.228	1.141	1.461	1.876	.605*	.654+
2nd Generation	1.038	1.153	1.569+	1.286	1.027	1.339
Time in the U.S.	.807	.740	.635*	1.091	.613	1.123**

+ p < .10 * p < .05 ** p < .01 ***p < .001

Controls: Gender, Age, SES, Academic Achievement

Reference category is: Not a Reason

Reference category for generation status is: 3rd Generation

VIF for acculturation variables between 1.026 and 1.753

Discussion

- The results of this study were mixed
 - H1 was not fully supported by the results -
 - Participants with higher levels of *linguistic acculturation*-
 - More likely to perceive: Staying Close to Home Instead of Going Away to School and Discrimination as barriers
 - But less likely to perceive: Tuition and Receiving a Poor High School Education as barriers
 - *Third generation status* participants-
 - More likely than *First Generation* participants to perceive the idea that You Don't Need College to be Successful as a barrier
 - Participants with longer *time in the U.S.*-
 - More likely to perceive the idea that You Don't Need College to be Successful as a barrier.
 - But less likely to perceive perceived Staying Close to Home Instead of going away to School and the Need to Work to earn money as barriers.

Discussion

- The hypothesis was developed as a result of existing literature which cites that Latinos with lower levels of certain acculturation measures (language and generation status) tend to not be as academically successful, enroll in college, or complete degrees as more acculturated Latinos.

Discussion

- Despite participants' personal characteristics which studies have shown to negatively impact academic achievement and level of educational attainment, those same factors did not fully translate into the perception of barriers for college enrollment and the completion of a degree.
- These individuals may not perceive greater barriers in education because they might have fewer interactions with majority culture systems.
- The results support the idea that certain individual, cultural, and social characteristics such as linguistic acculturation, generational status, time in the U.S. academic achievement, and socioeconomic status, affect life experiences as are related to the social construction of perceived barriers in education.

Discussion

- The perception that you do not need college to be successful by more acculturated participants (3rd generation & increased time in the U.S.) may be due to relatively high rates of pay of some jobs that do not require a degree.
 - Construction, with a national average annual salary for all construction workers of \$37,420
 - Compared with social workers, with a national average annual salary of \$37,611 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007).

Limitations

- This study is a cross-sectional study and therefore, changes in perceptions to barriers cannot be measured.
- Relatively small total sample size for a national survey, the results cannot be generalized to all Latinos in the United States.
- Comparisons to non-Latino participants could not be made because all participants were not asked the same questions.

Limitations

- Higher education statements in the survey are double barreled. The statements refer not only to enrollment in college, but also ask about the completion of a college degree in the same statement.
- The perceptions identified were choices in the survey and the participants were not allowed to give their own perceptions to barriers or answer “other.”
- Adolescents did not participate in this study and as a result, comparisons between adolescents' perceptions of barriers to access to higher education and adults cannot be made.

Implications for Social Work Practice

- School social workers as well as social workers in community based organizations must take into account that different levels and measures of acculturation may impact the perceptions of barriers to higher education among Latinos.
- School social workers must play a more active role in providing resources, information, and guidance to Latino students and their families.

Implications for Social Work Practice

- Social workers in community based organizations can work with more acculturated Latinos with college degrees to mentor less acculturated Latino students and families.
 - To prepare them for discrimination and barriers they may face as they become more acculturated and develop strategies to combat those issues.
 - To provide the knowledge of the higher education system and how to navigate the higher educational system in the U.S.

Next Steps

■ **Future Research:**

- Due to the number of limitations of this study, there are several next steps for future research.
 - Conduct focus groups, including adolescents as well as adults, to inquire about perceptions of barriers to Latino academic achievement, college enrollment, and the completion of a degree.
 - Use the information from the focus groups to develop a new survey.
 - Administer the survey in person rather than by phone and include adolescents.

Next Steps

- **Community Action:**

- Promote and facilitate collaboration among universities, community colleges, high schools, middle schools, elementary schools and communities to further explore and address identified barriers.

Questions
