Cultural Orientation Across Three Generations of Hispanic Adolescents

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*Acculturation among Hispanic adolescents involves learning the behaviors, beliefs, and values of American culture. This study examined changes in cultural orientation across three generations of adolescents (*N *= 203). Results indicated that Hispanic cultural orientation decreases in a linear trend across the first three generations, whereas American cultural orientation increases linearly. These findings suggest that within a few generations, most Hispanic adolescents exhibit a predominant American culture orientation while maintaining some traces of their Hispanic cultural orientation. Although home culture orientation diminishes across generations, it does not disappear completely. In addition, adolescents still retained allegiance to their Hispanic familial values.*

Acculturation processes occur in immigrant groups as they come in contact with the mainstream culture of their host country. Acculturation changes are continuous and result in a variety of acculturative conditions depending on the theoretical model of acculturation taken. Among the acculturative conditions identified based on psychological theory are the following: traditional, bicultural, assimilated, marginalized, separationalist, and others (Berry, 1980; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). Questions of acculturation are especially relevant for immigrant and U.S.-born Hispanic children who as adolescents must establish their self-identity. For instance, it is not known how long it takes an individual to acculturate to a new culture and whether it is possible to acculturate completely in one's lifetime. Does Hispanic cultural and ethnic identity diminish with increasing acculturation? With each succeeding generation, do Hispanic children identify less with their ethnic background and more with their host culture? For Hispanic adolescents, these questions can be addressed by examining how orientation toward the American and Hispanic cultures changes across generations.

Acculturation involves a complex set of attitudinal and behavioral changes that individuals undergo when there is contact with members of a

Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 22 No. 3, August 2000 390-398
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host group that is also the dominant social group in a community. More specifically, in a complex pluralistic society such as that which exists in the United States, acculturation is a process involving both direct and mediated exposure to new values and different lifestyles, and it also may be bidirectional as both immigrants and members of the same ethnic group born in the United States intimately interact. How do these changes occur? More specifically, how do adolescents navigate the competing demands of two cultures?

According to Szapocznik and Kurtines's (1980) psychosocial model of acculturation, individual acculturation is a linear function of the amount of time a person has been exposed to the host culture, and the rate at which the acculturation process takes place is a function of the age and gender of the individual. Furthermore, two aspects of the process of acculturation are differentiated: the process as it takes place along an overt behavioral dimension of functioning and the internalized process of value orientations. Their empirical findings showed that the rate of behavioral acculturation was an inverse linear function of age thus supporting the model. In addition, adult males acculturated more rapidly than their adult female counterparts along the behavioral dimension thereby also supporting the model.

Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) expanded their model to explain acculturation processes for individuals living in bicultural Latino communities. Members of this culture need to be able to participate in both the dominant culture and the Hispanic culture. This model, therefore, conceptualizes acculturation as a multidimensional process in which individuals accommodate to the host culture and retain various aspects of their Hispanic culture. This acculturation or bicultural model further suggests that the most important variable influencing the individual's accommodation to the host culture is the amount of time a person has been exposed to the host culture, whereas the most important variable influencing the individual's retention of the characteristics of the Hispanic culture is the degree and availability of community support for the culture of origin (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980). In both instances, these researchers believe that the age and gender of the individual may be related to the rate of change along these dimensions.

Szapocznik and Kurtines's (1980) model suggests that youth acculturate much faster than adults, but they do not explain why or how. In addition, researchers (Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992) have found that whereas ethnic behaviors and practices decline over time, commitment to one's group remains high. Recent findings by Cuellar, Nyberg, and Maldonado (1997) show that acculturation is highly correlated with generational status, such that later generation individuals are more acculturated than

immigrants or even second-generation individuals. In addition, the findings strongly suggest a reduction in ethnic orientation in Mexican Americans, with increased acculturation into the Anglo or mainstream culture. There seem to be discrepancies in these findings when it comes to explaining the acculturation of adolescents. In particular, why do adolescents exhibit increased behavioral changes toward the host culture and a decrease in orientation toward their Hispanic culture?

In the important process of adult identity formation that begins during adolescence, peer groups exert an undue influence on adolescents. Because peers often are likely to have a strong American culture orientation, it would be expected that with time, Latino adolescents would develop a stronger affiliation to their American culture. In addition, adolescence is a period when peers exert a stronger influence on behavior than do parents, thereby potentially weakening Hispanic culture orientation. Likewise, because of their own acculturation, second-generation and later generation parents adopt American culture behaviors so that the Hispanic culture exposure that adolescents experience at home diminishes greatly from the first generation to the third generation. As a result, both children and parents exhibit an American cultural orientation (Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1995).

Therefore, within the psychosocial model of acculturation, these findings suggest that later generation Hispanics are more likely to be oriented toward American culture and less toward Hispanic culture than earlier generations, not just at the behaviors and practice level but also in terms of identifying with American culture. This study examines changes in cultural orientation across three generations of adolescents. It is hypothesized that Hispanic adolescents will be more oriented toward American culture and less toward Hispanic culture with each successive generation. A second hypothesis is that later generation youth will be more acculturated than first-generation youth. Finally, we include a separate self-reported measure of family support to examine how familism changes across generations. We hypothesize that because family orientation is a strong Hispanic cultural value, family support will remain unchanged across generations.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 203 Hispanic students from a predominantly Hispanic high school in a suburb of Los Angeles County. The sample was composed of 48% males and 52% females with a mean age of 15.12 (SD = .972). In addition, the

majority of the children were of Mexican or Mexican American heritage. Eighty-seven percent of the students were born in the United States. Of students born outside the United States, the mean age of arrival varied greatly, ranging from 1 to 10 years (M = 4.77, SD = 3.14) at time of arrival.

Students were divided into three generational groups. Students born outside the United States were considered first generation (n = 27). Students born in the United States but whose parents were foreign born were considered second generation (n = 147). Finally, third generation consisted of students born in the United States whose parents where also U.S. born (n = 29).

Measures

The Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire (BIQ) (Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980) was used to measure participants' American and Hispanic cultural orientations. The BIQ measures respondents' degree of comfort when speaking English and Spanish independent of each other, and their preferred level of involvement in Euro-American culture and Hispanic culture also independent of each other. The BIQ, therefore, yields two independent measures of language use or cultural involvement reflecting respondent's orientation to both Euro-American culture (Americanism) and Hispanic Culture (Hispanism). Responses to all 31 items are scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with higher scores being in the direction of greater orientation to the target culture or language. In addition, a separate acculturation score was obtained for each respondent by taking the absolute value of the difference between Americanism and Hispanism scores.

The Family Support Scale developed for use with Mexican descent individuals (Buriel, 1998) was used to measure adolescent's relationships with their family. The scale measures how much subjects rely on their family for emotional support. Sample items include, "There is a member of my family I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later," and "My family gives me the moral support I need." Respondents rate their responses to the 10 statements about family relations as either "yes," "no," or "don't know."

Procedure

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger study that examined informal translation experiences of Hispanic students. A bilingual research assistant administered the survey to students during their science or English class. All questionnaires were administered in English. The research assistant read the questions out loud one at a time so that everyone would

answer the same question at the same time. Students took approximately 20 minutes to complete the entire questionnaire.

Results

Individual scores for American and Hispanic cultural orientation were computed for each subject (see Table 1). Separate analyses were computed for gender and gender by generation, but no differences were observed between male and female respondents on any of the comparisons. Thus, all analyses are reported for generational status alone with no further gender breakouts. One-way analyses of variance indicated significant differences in American, $F(2, 200) = 8.221$, $p < .001$, and Hispanic, $F(2, 200) = 8.810$, $p < .001$, cultural orientation across the three generations (see Figure 1). Post hoc pair-wise comparisons (Tukey's HSD) showed that for American cultural orientation, third-generation students had significantly higher mean scores ($M = 81.19$) than both the first ($M = 74.49$) and second-generation ($M = 77.17$) students. However, first-generation and second-generation students did not differ from each other on American cultural orientation. On Hispanic cultural orientation, first-generation students had significantly higher Hispanic cultural orientation scores ($M = 74.74$) than did second-generation (68.01) and third-generation (62.07) students, and as expected, second-generation students had significantly higher Hispanic orientation scores than did third-generation students (see Table 2).

As expected, third-generation youth were more acculturated than the second generation, who in turn were more acculturated than the first-generation adolescents, $F(2, 200) = 7.523$, $p < .001$. However, contrary to the findings reported by Cuellar et al. (1997), Hispanic cultural values, as measured by family support, did not change uniformly across generations, $F(2, 200) = 4.496$, $p < .05$. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons showed no significant differences between first-, second-, and third-generation family support (see Table 2). The findings do show a waning of familism between the second-generation and third-generation adolescents who report significantly higher family support than their third-generation adolescents. A surprising result from this study is the finding that scores for American and Hispanic cultural orientation are identical for the first-generation respondents (Hispanic = 74.7407; American = 74.4902). These findings confirm the hypothesis that as the generational level progresses from immigrant status to third generation, American cultural orientation increases in a linear fashion and Hispanic cultural orientation decreases in a similar pattern. Cultural values, on the other hand, as measured by family support, remain stable across the first three generations.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Generation	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Hispanic cultural orientation	First	27	74.74	9.69
	Second	147	68.01	11.58
	Third	29	62.07	11.12
American cultural orientation	First	27	74.49	5.94
	Second	147	77.17	6.59
	Third	29	81.19	4.94
Family support	First	27	16.53	3.18
	Second	147	17.34	3.18
	Third	29	15.52	2.50
Acculturation	First	27	8.13	8.77
	Second	147	14.24	10.51
	Third	29	19.11	12.53

Table 2. Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons

	Generation (I)	Generation (J)	Mean difference (I – J)	*SE*
Hispanic cultural orientation	First	Second	6.73*	2.36
	—	Third	12.67**	3.02
	Second	Third	5.93*	2.29
American cultural orientation	First	Second	–2.68	1.32
	—	Third	–6.70**	1.68
	Second	Third	–4.02**	1.28
Family support	First	Second	–0.81	0.65
	—	Third	1.01	0.83
	Second	Third	1.82*	0.63
Acculturation	First	Second	–6.11*	2.22
	—	Third	–10.99*	2.84
	Second	Third	–4.88	2.16

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Discussion

Acculturation is the process of learning, among other things, the behaviors (e.g., language and lifestyle), and beliefs and values of a host culture. In most instances, acculturation refers to the learning of new patterns of behavior that immigrants must engage in following their migration from the culture of origin (e.g., Mexico) to a new culture (e.g., United States) (Berry, 1980). Research on acculturation has shown that several different conditions facili-

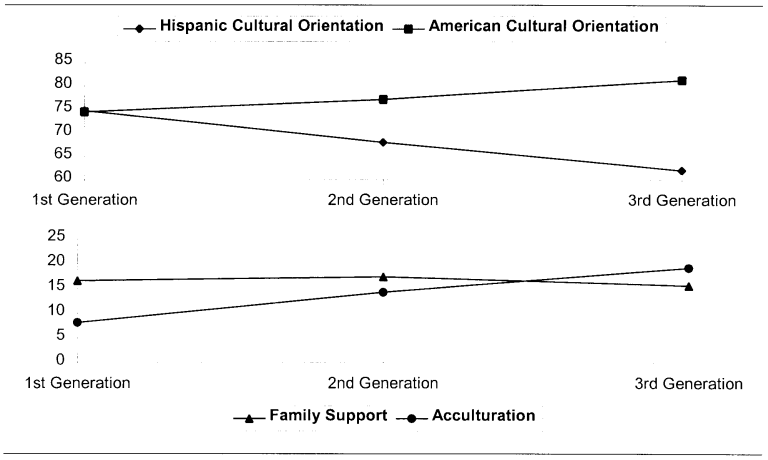

Figure 1. American and Hispanic cultural orientation, family support, and acculturation by generation.

tate the process of acculturation. These conditions include age at time of immigration, schooling experience in the Unites States, and contact with members of the majority group and/or more acculturated members of their same ethnic group. Each of these variables affects acculturation in different ways (Cuellar et al., 1995).

If children immigrate at a very early age and if parents do not reinforce the home culture, children will experience an eventual loss of parts or all of the home language. In turn, these children acquire accumulated knowledge of American culture and language through the school and peers. The longer an immigrant child spends in American schools, the greater is their potential for acculturation to the mainstream society. Because the immigrant adolescents in this study all migrated at an early age ($M = 4.74$ years), it is understandable that their Hispanic and American cultural orientation scores were nearly identical. Furthermore, the offspring and grandchildren of immigrants, the second and third generation, therefore have an extremely high potential for acculturation. This does not negate the fact that adolescents may retain some allegiance to their Hispanic values, as our findings indicate. Our findings suggest that although home culture orientation diminishes across generations, it does not disappear completely. As this study shows, however, Hispanic cultural orientation decreases in a linear fashion across the first three

generations, whereas American cultural orientation increases in a similar pattern (see Figure 1). These findings suggest that within a few generations, most Hispanic adolescents exhibit a predominant American culture orientation while maintaining traces of their Hispanic cultural orientation.

Greater interpersonal contact with members of the host culture or with acculturated Hispanics gives rise to a more rapid acculturation process (Cuellar et al., 1995). This is evident in our sample, where the predominant ethnic group in the school was Hispanic, but teachers and acculturated peers influenced the more ethnic-oriented students to shift toward the cultural orientation of the dominant group. Peer groups, by far, play a very important role in influencing American cultural orientation. Adolescents learn from their peers' acceptable forms of (American) dress and mannerisms and acquire the popular culture of their age mates. Finally, the absence of a gender effect does not support the conjecture of Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) that women acculturate less rapidly than men. Perhaps this lack of a gender effect indicates that acculturation is different for adolescents than for adults or that things have changed in the ensuing two decades since Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) conducted their initial studies of acculturation with Cuban Americans.

Identity formation in adolescence might play a key role in Hispanic adolescents' choice to relinquish most aspects of Hispanic culture and to embrace their American counterparts as evident in our data. A key question is, Why are some cultural aspects maintained whereas others are lost? What role does cultural orientation serve in adolescents' efforts to define who they are as individuals? Felix-Ortiz, Newcomb, and Myers (1995) and Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) find that language and behavior change but that certain values remain intact over several generations. Our study replicates these findings. More specifically, it seems that external behaviors (those required to function in mainstream culture) change, for example, the shift from Spanish to English as the primary language of communication. However, another process is at work in controlling how some core values (e.g., those required for family interaction and functioning) from the home culture are maintained across at least several generations (Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1995).

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