Acculturative misunderstandings and their influence on Mexican American first generation college students

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Abstract

Mexican-Americans are a growing population in the United States and with such a large population growth, emerging research on the acculturative processes that this population experiences seeks to explain how Mexican-Americans are engaging with education and healthcare spaces through their own intersectional lens. The effects of this acculturation process are widespread but for the purpose of this thesis the role of acculturation in two specific areas, academic and healthcare realms, were addressed. I aimed to identify the link between these two areas by looking at two cognitive, cultural factors of Mexican identity, familism and fatalism, and assessing how they influence an individual's access to resources, both academic and healthcare related. The lack of education and research surrounding acculturation is indicative that the United States holds a parochial notion that will continue to prevent Mexican-American first generation college students from accessing the resources they need to succeed. Researchers need to change the way they study acculturation and choose to leverage that knowledge in order to serve these populations with culturally competent resources and diagnoses.

For my Mom and Dad— Gracias por enseñarme a cuestionar todo. Esto es para ustedes y para todos los otros padres que hacen sacrificios por sus hijos para que podamos seguir nuestros sueños.

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Introduction

The popular 1997 biopic film *Selena*, made a blatant statement about the impact that acculturation has on Mexican-Americans, *"We have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, both at the same time! It's exhausting. Nobody knows how tough it is being a Mexican-American."* The statement, although comedic in nature, makes an excellent point about the journey that Mexican-Americans face as they attempt to navigate two cultures. Twenty years later and this statement still stands—Mexican-Americans are still facing the same issues of negotiating between two cultures, also known as the process of acculturation.

It is no secret that Mexican-Americans are a growing population in the United States; according to the 2010 Census, between 2000 and 2010 the Mexican origin population in the United States increased by 54 percent. This population's growth from 20.6 million to 31.8 million in a ten-year span begins to demonstrate the importance of continued research on how this population adjusts to United States customs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). With such a large population growth in the United States, emerging research on the process of negotiating between two cultures that Mexican-Americans experience attempts to explain how these populations are engaging with education and healthcare spaces through their own intersectional lens.

At DePaul alone, 16 percent of the overall student population identifies as Hispanic or Latino and 32 percent of freshman enrolled are first generation college students (DePaul, 2016). With these statistics in mind I set out to identify how my peers navigated resources in their undergraduate careers by looking at a national body of research on the acculturative journey. The effects of this acculturation process are widespread but for the purpose of this project I chose to examine the role of acculturation in two specific areas: the academic realm for Mexican-American first generation college students and the healthcare world to highlight student struggles

to overcome inequitable access to accurate health diagnoses. I aimed to identify the link between these two areas by looking at two cognitive, cultural factors of Mexican identity, familism and fatalism, and assessing how they influence an individual's access to resources, both academic and healthcare related.

The 2016-2017 school year at DePaul was the first year on record where administration intentionally hired mental health counselors of color after student demands for counselors who understood the intersectional experience reached an all-time high. These struggles my peers faced in receiving culturally competent care in their higher education experiences inspired the intent of this thesis and provided the goal of better understanding how Mexican-American first generation college student's access to resources is affected by their acculturative journey. Beyond the acculturative journey my thesis seeks to determine what institutions of higher education, such as DePaul, can do to serve students in these often-misunderstood, under researched populations. Ultimately, my research seeks to determine how acculturation impacts Mexican-American first generation college students as they navigate the world of higher education and cope with culturally incompetent healthcare in the United States, provide suggestions for further research and build a the foundation for a student workshop to help understand the relationship between acculturation and their undergraduate experience as students strive to connect with resources and equitable acknowledgment in academic spaces.

Acculturation

The idea of acculturation first appeared in academia in the 1920s as a way to describe the cultural interactions of Native Americans as they navigated the new cultural space American settlers imposed on them (McDermott-Levy, 2009). Since then, despite this process dominating literature on the immigrant experience, it remains an elusive theory to the populations actually

experiencing acculturation themselves; this is just one of the many issues attributed to the way the acculturative process is addressed in academia. Nonetheless, simply put, acculturation theory suggests that when groups of individuals from different cultures interact with one another, individuals will exhibit changes in their manifestation of the original cultural constructs caused by the presence of both groups (Redfield, Linton and Herskovitz, 1936). Acculturation, then, is the process of negotiating the adoption of another culture. The more of a another culture that an individual is exposed to, the more likely they are to demonstrate behavioral and cognitive changes from the acculturative process. The depth of these changes depends on the willingness of the host and original culture to participate and engage in the acculturative process (McDermott-Levy, 2009). Although acculturation is a widely accepted theory by researchers the extent of acculturation an individual exhibits is largely contingent upon the experience of the individual and the cultures they are negotiating between—there is no overarching, singular acculturative experience.

It is because there is no singular acculturative experience that it is important for education and healthcare professionals to understand the process of acculturation and assess where an individual is on their acculturative journey, especially, if they would like to develop ways to better serve the populations that are transitioning towards adopting American norms. The process of acculturating and bridging the learning gap between two cultures often takes up to three generations in the United States, meaning there are three generations of individuals at odds with two cultures whose journey typically goes unrecognized by healthcare providers and educational professionals (Spector, 2004). This pull between cultures can adversely impact an individual and I argue that two of the most critical areas negatively affected by a lack of understanding of the acculturation process, are healthcare and education.

The negative affects of misunderstanding the acculturation process typically stems from the lack of consistent methods of assessment tools employed by researchers. When it comes to assessing acculturation there are two ways to approach its measurement, a linear unidimensional model or a bidimensional model that acknowledges the complex process of adopting a second culture. Accurate measurements of the process of acculturation can help educators and healthcare professionals better serve these Mexican-American first-generation populations. However, accuracy becomes a challenge because some of the first available tools seeking to measure acculturation in these populations have assumed that acculturation is solely a linear process that can be explained by a unidimensional model. This assumption in turn has led to consistent misdiagnoses in healthcare and a lack of resources available to Mexican-American students. The unidimensional model of acculturation suggests that acculturation is a linear process with the goal of assimilation in which immigrants have two options, either reject their original culture and adapt the host culture or remain linked to solely their original culture (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk, 2003). In terms of existing unidimensional models, the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics developed by Marin et al., (1987) was widely accepted in academia from 1987 to 1995. Again, the primary issue with this tool was its reliance on the view that assimilation was the end goal of acculturation.

On the other hand, bidimensional models of acculturation support the choice of immigrants to choose to what extent they will adopt the new culture (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk, 2003). Popular bidimensional models of acculturation include John Berry's (1990) four-mode process of acculturation that consists of marginalization, separation, integration and assimilation. This model enables individuals to adopt a new culture at their own pace and supports the possibility of maintaining their original cultural identity in selected spaces and

exhibiting behavior of assimilation in others. Berry's model provides four nonlinear modes of acculturation that an individual can fluctuate between and serves as a much more realistic example of how individuals experience exposure to two different cultures. The first mode in Berry's model is assimilation, in which individuals relinquish their cultural identity in an effort to quickly adopt the host culture's norms. Conversely, is the strategy of separation where individuals hold onto their original culture and avoid the host culture (Berry, 1997). These two modes serve as the more drastic responses an individual may have to being placed into a new culture. More popularly exhibited by individuals is the mode Berry describes as integration, in which aspects of both cultures are embraced and the individual holds an ongoing negotiation between both cultures. Individuals in this mode typically integrate by selecting which culture they will showcase on a case-by-case basis across different settings. For example, an individual may choose to exhibit their original culture in social spaces such as family gatherings and then opt to adopt their host culture in professional settings such as the workplace as to not disturb norms. A popular manifestation of this mode is the utilization of code switching to adapt to conflicting settings. Finally, Berry's fourth mode of marginalization depicts another extreme exhibited by acculturating populations where interactions with either culture are not possible nor desired (Berry, 1997). Ultimately, assimilation, separation and marginalization are the more dangerous modes that leave populations susceptible to negative repercussions of acculturation such as mistreatment, misdiagnoses and lack of access to resources.

While Berry's model is a strong explanation of the acculturation process, other models address the measurement and understanding of this process by using qualitative scales. Among these models is the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans (ARSMA-II), which was developed by Cuellar et al., (1995) to assess the behavioral acculturative behaviors of Mexican

Americans. The ARSMA-II model addresses acculturation by splitting individuals into five levels of acculturation: level one represents a Mexican orientation, level two showcases a Mexican focused, bicultural orientation, level three marks a slightly Anglo focused, bicultural orientation, level four demonstrates an Anglo focused bicultural orientation and level five marks the final phase of assimilation to an Anglocized individual (Cuellar et al., 1995). Similar to Berry's model, ARMSA-II encourages the classification of an individual into a phase of the acculturative journey. While ARMSA-II succeeds in acknowledging the multi-step process, the levels Cuellar et al. describes suggest that assimilation is the end goal and the process to acculturate from one culture to another is a linear one (1995).

While this list of acculturative models it not exhaustive it addresses popular models that have found success in serving Mexican-American populations as they acculturate. These models demonstrate that it is vital to determine where an individual is in their acculturation journey if professionals are interested in serving the unique needs of these populations. The prevailing realization in existing research has been that these needs prompted by changes in culture not only have behavioral effects but also cognitive effects that are often overlooked. An example of this oversight manifests itself during the clinical evaluation of patients seeking mental healthcare resources who are faced with interacting with healthcare professionals who write off their acculturative journey as a small symptom of moving to another country as opposed to a defining experience (Cuellar et al., 1995; McDermott-Levy, 2009). It is clear that failing to properly understand the acculturation journey and ignoring the effects of the process leaves Mexican-Americans first generation students at a disadvantage as they attempt navigate through life in the United States.

These models also illustrate that the acculturation process is a complex one which does not automatically equal the complete adoption of another culture. Another point worth addressing is the role that assimilation plays in fueling misconceptions about acculturating populations. It is not enough to acknowledge that assimilation is not the end goal, researchers must also acknowledge that even in the case of assimilation, because of an individual's intersectional experience, their adoption of American values and norms will not result in a replication of the values their white counterparts hold. However, despite this vital insight, in cross-cultural psychology assimilation has become synonymous with the term acculturation (Berry, 1997). Keefe's (1980) research counters this synonymy by highlighting the fact that even Mexican-Americans who are highly acculturated to American culture still do not hold the same characteristics or responses to situations that white non-Hispanics do. The question then becomes, how do researchers measure and understand these differences especially when assimilation does not equal the adoption of American culture that is expected. It is because of this realization that acculturation becomes increasingly important to monitor in instances where the two cultures an individual is negotiating between hold polar opposite cultural norms. The urgency behind this push for understanding is illustrated by Cuellar et al.'s (1995) conclusion, that the greater the difference between cultures, the higher likelihood of misdiagnosis and miscommunication between the healthcare provider and the individual. With that in mind, researchers are then faced with the challenge of pin pointing which cultural constructs in the original culture should be monitored to best measure the changes an individual will undergo throughout their acculturative journey.

Mexican Cultural Constructs

Those addressing the issue of acculturation in Mexican-American populations have attempted to hone in on the cognitive cultural constructs that provide the best framework for measuring the acculturation gap that individuals face when adopting another culture. Most notably, Cuellar et al. (1995) utilized the cultural variables of machismo, folk illness, familism, fatalism, and personalism based on their perceived influences on the delivery of mental healthcare services. The use of these five cultural variables has since been replicated to some extent by researchers seeking to develop more accurate acculturative scales. Of these five factors, familism and fatalism have proven to be two of the more influential constructs leveraged by other researchers studying acculturation.

Broadly speaking, familism refers to the emotional support offered to individuals within Mexican culture and is arguably one of the most important constructs of Mexican culture (Moore, 1970; Cuellar et al. 1995). The impact of familism has been recognized as influential in numerous aspects of an individual's life ranging from its impact on educational choices to the role it plays in helping individuals make decisions on where to move. It is because of the far reaching impact of familism that researchers have begun dividing the construct into three dimensions: the importance of family, the role of the family support network and the impact of family conflict on acculturation (Sabogal, Marin and Otero-Sabogal, 1987; Rodriguez et al. 2007). These three dimensions attempt to showcase the multifaceted role of this one construct. Furthermore, Sabogal et al. and Marin (1986; 1987), assert that there are two ways of exhibiting these dimensions of familism that are not always acknowledged in the literature—behavioral and attitudinal. In first generation Mexican-Americans, attitudinal familism, which is best exemplified by the values of family such as loyalty and reciprocity, are more present in

comparison to behavioral familism, that exemplified in the behaviors affiliated to these familial values (Sabogal et al., 1987). This means that a first generation individual is more likely to hold onto these familial values and internalize the theory of them as opposed to actively making choices directly related to the responsibilities they feel as a result of familism. However, as these generations begin their acculturative journeys their preferences for attitudinal and behavioral familism preferences can shift to embrace familism as a motivating construct in their lives based on the perceived support they feel. In essence, an individual will base their embodiment of familism behaviors on the acceptance they are afforded of this cultural value in any given setting within their host culture.

When it comes to the acknowledgement of familism, Rodriguez et al. (2007) found that there was a positive correlation between the support familism affords individuals and an individual's success. However, this success was contingent upon the acceptance of Mexican cultural identity that is often defined by familism. Researchers have suggested that the support networks individuals through have access to because of familism actually aid individuals as they adapt to another culture and have proven to positively impact their mental health and psychological development (Keefe, Padilla and Carlos 1979). Familism's role has historically been to help individual's combat stressors (Keefe et al., 1987; Valle and Martinez, 1980). For example, this construct provides individuals with a network of social support to face hardships with, problems do not solely belong to an individual, instead, they are problems that a family can develop a solution for together. It is because of Mexico's collectivist nature that familism holds such success in this aspect of addressing adversity. However, Sabogal, Marin and Otero-Sabogal (1987) found that the value of familial obligations diminished the more acculturated an individual became. As an individual became more acculturated, they denied more and more of

their Mexican cultural identity and thus the role that familism held in their lives decreased. This catch-22 demonstrates acculturation's diminishment of familism resulting in individuals exhibiting signs of psychological distress that would otherwise be avoided by leveraging their familial support network. Undeniably so familism impacts the experience of the individual with specific regard to how they approach difficult situations. Despite this impact, however, Rodriguez et al. (2007) contends that although familism is accepted as a key construct the measurement of this construct is inconsistent across different studies of acculturation due to the lack of an overarching definition of familism. It is because of this inconsistency that understanding familism is important to further determine how an individual could maneuver their own acculturative process.

Fatalism, another key determinant in the process of acculturation, is an indicator of how an individual distressful approaches situations. Cuellar et al. (1995), defines fatalism as the factor that determines how much a population believes that their fate is out of their control. This cultural construct can often manifest itself in the form of passivity and a reliance on the forces of fate. Fatalism typically translates to a dependence on a prescribed notion related to religious beliefs. Neff and Hoppe's 1993 study of the impact of fatalism and religiosity have on psychological distress asserts that at its most fundamental level, the construct of fatalism provides a form of social support for individuals as they face barriers like uncontrollable life situations such as death, financial hardships and health issues. It is because fatalism can be a representation of how much personal control an individual feels over any given situation that it is associated with adaptive and mental health problems amongst acculturating Mexican-American populations (Cuellar et al., 1995). With specific regard to the acculturative experience of a Mexican-American, it is worth acknowledging that the impact of fatalism differs in

individualistic contexts versus collectivist contexts. For example, in the United States where individualism is an accepted national cultural construct, fatalism is seen as a maladaptive behavior that deems an individual to be lazy and incapable of taking control of their life. This assumption puts Mexican-Americans acculturating to American culture at a disadvantage, whereas in Mexico, a collectivist culture, fatalism is seen as a behavior that demonstrates your faith related values (Neff and Hoppe, 1993). It is troubling to see a positive fundamental, cultural value in Mexico viewed as a maladaptive behavior in the United States but it provides a strong image for the uneasiness that acculturating individuals are forced to face as they negotiate their way through two different worlds.

As previously mentioned, underlying issues with these cultural constructs is the fact that existing research fails to adequately identify and name the scope of their impact. The lack of strong, overarching definitions and measurements of these constructs throughout the acculturative process places a hold on culturally intelligent resources available to these populations. For that reason, I argue that familism and fatalism exhibit prominence due to the correlation between these two constructs and two cultural dimensions within Geert Hofstede's definition of national culture. For the sake of analysis and movement towards more unifying definitions needed to access the gaps between cultures, in this thesis familism is equated with the individualism dimension and fatalism is equated with the uncertainty avoidance dimension. While Hofstede's theoretical framework used to define these cultural dimensions was intended to show national values in the workplace, the scoring of the cultural dimensions provides readers with a numerical value that compares two different countries cultural differences (2001).

When looking at Hofstede's comparison of Mexico and the United States, two of the starkest differences in national culture are found within the individualism and uncertainty

avoidance dimensions. On a one hundred-point scale Mexico ranks 30 against the United States who comes in at 91 on the individualism dimension (Hofstede, 2001). In accordance with Hofstede's model, the higher the score on the individualism dimension the higher a nation's preference for a loosely-knot social framework and an individual's tendency to think in the "I" mindset versus the "we" (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, Mexico's low score indicates a preference for a "we" or collectivist culture that is depicted by their strong sense of familism.

Another difference is seen when comparing Mexico and the United States on uncertainty avoidance levels; here Mexico scores an 82 in contrast to the United States' 46 (Hofstede, 2001). With this cultural dimension the higher the score the larger extent to which a country feels threatened by the unknown and thus enforces rigid rules and belief systems, such as faith as a way to navigate the ambiguous situations they may face (Hofstede, 2001). This ideology for dealing with the unknown is consistent with the role that fatalism and religion play in Mexican culture.

Theoretically the drastic differences in these two dimensions of culture are the gaps that need to be filled by the process of acculturation. Therefore, an individual with a Mexican cultural identification who lives in the United States must find a common ground between both cultures on these issues of familism and fatalism or they can elect to abandon one culture for the other. This process of bridging the gap is not a linear one nor is it one that is measured accurately by researchers today, which becomes a problem when Mexican-Americans seek out mental healthcare and educational resources.

Acculturation's impact on access to resources

Access to resources is typically an issue for acculturating populations due to the assumptions that are projected onto these individuals. For example, acculturation has been shown

to have an impact on the health behaviors of immigrant families. As more knowledge has become available surrounding the relation between acculturation and health behaviors a greater importance has been placed on healthcare practitioners making the effort to better understand acculturation to provide individuals with culturally competent healthcare (McDermott-Levy, 2009). McDermott-Levy's (2009) research places an emphasis on Berry's mode of integration when describing the way that acculturation affects healthcare choices and asserts that the host culture can be adapted by immigrants in their professional lives and as a trade off their original cultural practices remain a fixture in their personal lives. The viewpoint of the acculturation process as a non-linear journey provides professionals with the opportunity to see how an immigrant strategically shifts their acculturative tendencies to lean towards or away from a host culture with in an effort to navigate barriers put in front of them, such as health concerns. In these cases it is important to recognize the use of familism and fatalism as motives to make the shift toward or away from their host culture. To what extent that an individual chooses to leverage constructs like familism and fatalism serves as an indicator of where they are in the process of acculturation. These choices among other stresses attributed to adopting another culture and learning the new practices can result in depression and anxiety (McDermott-Levy, 2009).

Aside from healthcare contexts, the cultural constructs of familism and fatalism have also been shown to influence acculturating Mexican-American first generation students. When it comes to the role familism plays in the success of first generation college students Gloria and Castellanos (2012) assert that Latino first generation college students are empowered by the familial connections they are able to maintain in their collegiate journey. The role of family is seen as a collective unit that both assists and motivates an individual in their pursuit of

education. Despite only 6 percent of Mexican-Americans in the United States holding a bachelors degree, this population flourishes under the support of their familial network and leverages that social support as a motive to obtain a degree to both advance the family and make the network proud. Furthermore, familism in the collegiate world can positively influence the student's focus by providing them with a intersectional role, that combats their sense of alienation on campus, highlights their ties to their home life and serves as an extension of their familial tendencies to help them engage with new communities found in college (Benmayor, 2012). If a student is allotted the space to expand their familial network to professionals spaces on campus the negotiation between the two cultures becomes easier. In reference back to Rodriguez et al. (2007), when a student's sense of familism is diminished they are put at a higher risk of exhibiting depressive and stress related behaviors. Therefore, when spaces in the educational setting become available for students to embrace those familial behaviors and attitudes, this cultural construct is not sacrificed for the sake of acculturating and students are in turn saved from those deteriorative health behaviors and they are empowered in both settings. Students who are able to sustain both worlds in spite of pressures to acculturate are able to take on the roles of what Benmayor describes as "family advocates and community builders" (2002). These roles allow the individual to remain true to the attitudinal values familism instilled in them while giving them the opportunity to demonstrate behavioral aspects of familism in a professional setting where the sharing of two cultures has not always been promoted. Take for example, student groups appearing on college campuses like Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A) or DePaul's own Alliance for Latino Empowerment (D.A.L.E), these groups are representative of the positive impact of that spaces for students can have. Student organizations like these present students with the opportunity to not only acknowledge their

cultural roots but also offer an extension of that familial social support network that is critical to their success in their undergraduate experience. Apart from the mentorship and replication of familial ties that these organizations provide students are also afforded the opportunity to bridge the gap between their original and host culture through leadership roles and in turn make the negotiation of culture an opportunity to fight for access to resources that is not just viewed as an individual's singular experience but instead it is recognized as an advocacy battle within student affairs at the collegiate level.

Despite the promise of this multifaceted identity to be advocates and community builders, this is only possible if these first generation college students are granted the space to explore and strengthen their connections with their cultural identity while navigating the collegiate world (Hsiao, 1992). Success in the collegiate world for these Mexican-American students is contingent upon the acknowledgement of their familial support networks and their active integration into the individual's time in college, a notion that is not encouraged by the acculturative process nor officials in higher education who can unknowingly push for the diminishment of the presence of familism. These spaces are critical to the success of first generation students because the network it affords them builds trust between an individual and an institution and grants them access to resources.

While the extension of familial networks is critical to an individual's access to resources in college these spaces are not always guaranteed and the ramifications of their absence is widespread. In fact, when it comes to actively seeking out resources from an institution, Hispanic first-generation college students struggle to make deliberate connections with faculty and academic advisors unless they are experiencing "an academic crisis," a behavior that is replicated in the healthcare world as well (Torres et al., 2006; McDermott-Levy, 2009). This lack of trust is

in due part to the lack of available spaces for these individuals to build community amongst those who share the same cultural background, the detrimental affects of these missing spaces becomes particularly apparent when these students are enrolled in predominantly white institutions (Torres et al., 2006). DePaul University, a university with a 55 percent white enrollment is a place where students are particularly susceptible to feeling the brunt of a lack of physical and mental spaces available for students to explore their culture. These findings suggest that networks that replicate the sense of community a student feels in their home culture are essential to the continued success of Mexican-American first generation college students because they provide students with an extension of familism and offer them the encouragement they need to connect with resources.

Connecting students with the resources they need is not solely about creating spaces for them to continue exploring their cultural identity, it also requires that educators understand how cultural constructs of Mexican identity influence the decisions students make throughout their undergraduate careers. McWhirter, Torres and Salgado (2007) found that during their educational journey Mexican-American students were more likely to expect to encounter barriers associated with separation from their family and confidence to succeed in comparison to Whites. Researchers have determined that because of the role that familism plays in the individual's life, students are more likely to adapt their educational plans to their familial needs, thus explaining the perceived barriers to success in education students feel (McWhirter et al., 2007). These perceived barriers can go unnoticed if an educator has lack of knowledge surrounding the acculturative process and the role familism plays in expectations and goal setting. In such cases, American educators who are rooted in an individualistic mindset can misinterpret a student's hesitation caused by familism as laziness or incompetence because they opt to place importance

on their collectivist family unit. Existing studies on freshman, Mexican-American first generation college students remind us that emotional and cultural support for these students is critical to their success in college (Benmayor, 2002; Gloria and Castellanos, 2012). Therefore, assumptions rooted in a misunderstanding of cultural norms rob students of the emotional and cultural support they need to be succeed and feel as though they belong. In order for universities to retain these populations and encourage their continued success the acknowledgment of a student's original culture can be used as a tool to help them develop a sense of belonging with their institution. Moreover, recognition of where an individual is in their acculturative process is important when inviting students into these spaces to connect with their Mexican cultural identity.

While the first step to helping students overcome perceived barriers to success and resources is to understand how the student's culture influences the root of these barriers, the next step in culturally competent service is recognizing the different ways that students choose to navigate those perceived barriers. McWhirter et al. (2007), suggest that the conflicting desires of remaining close to family and pursuing academic interests that may be geographically separate from family leads to these perceived barriers and thus resulting in lowered self-efficacy. A low self-efficacy desire then dictates the behaviors and imitative a student will take in fulfilling their individual goals. The self-efficacy issue draws us back to the role fatalism plays in an acculturating individual's undergraduate journey. Fatalism and a low self-efficacy are one in the same and both adversely affect the power a student believes they hold over a specific situation. This can manifest itself in a number of ways, for example, because of the responsibility that students feel they have to their family they may feel as though certain barriers caused by family are perceived as a result of fate, a notion which can lead to students defaulting to fatalistic

behaviors and accepting the barrier as something that is out of their control. This lack of confidence and self-efficacy is an example of how fatalism can behaviorally affect individuals. Again, this presents an issue for educators and healthcare practitioners who are seeking to connect with first generation Mexican-American students seeking to acculturate. An American educator who believes that the future is theirs to control, can become frustrated with a student whose cultural identity suggests that fate or a higher power controls the circumstances they face. The key here is cultural intelligence gathered from an understanding of how cultural constructs influence the decision making process when it comes to students seeking out help and resources. In addition to this, educators and healthcare professionals must not forget that culturally competent service to these populations is a two part process, understanding of the factors impacted by acculturation and an assessment of where a student stands on their acculturative journey.

Problems with assessing acculturation

As previously mentioned there are a number of tools available to help educators and healthcare practitioners broaden their understanding of where an individual stands on their acculturative journey, however, these tools come with their own limitations. There are a number of issues with current acculturation tools being used in research today. Marin and Gamba (1996) argue that the problem with acculturation assessment tools is their lack of universal application to different cultural subgroups within the Hispanic population. For example, there are existing tools for Hispanic college students, Mexican-Americans, and Puerto Ricans, but the application feasibility of these scales to other populations beyond their target group is unknown. While one universal acculturation tool would be useful when treating an individual with a Hispanic identification, I believe individuals would benefit from the development of these subgroup

specific measurement tools. The notion that there can be one universal tool to assess acculturation is antithetical to the acceptance of a bidimensional approach to acculturation that research has gravitated towards. Existing research contends that acculturation is not a linear experience, moreover, it is an unequal in consistent process that is reliant on the individual's experience in adapting, relinquishing or retaining aspects of either culture (McDermott-Levy, 2009). With that said, by enforcing tools that are broad in nature, individuals with specific, intersectional identities are lost in the shuffle of research and their intersectional experience goes unacknowledged often prompting misunderstandings and misdiagnoses. The existing research which address issues of acculturation that populates the world of academia paints a landscape of inconsistencies of the impact of acculturation on mental health and education, likely because researchers are focused on finding a universal tool as opposed to a customized one that addresses the intersectional struggles of individuals who identify as Mexican-Americans within the Hispanic community.

Conclusion

The use of mechanisms to further current understandings of acculturation is a two-sided problem. Firstly, there are not adequate methods available to measure acculturation. Secondly, even when acculturation is understood individuals are still not given culturally competent resources in either education or health related contexts because the constructs, like familism and fatalism, that determine how a student navigates resources and barriers remain unacknowledged by professionals. The current mindset that many practitioners in the United States hold is that acculturation has a solid end goal of assimilation towards behaviors equal to whites, when in reality the process is a multifaceted and complex constant negotiation between both cultures. Not only is this ethnocentric notion harmful to Mexican-American populations but it also assumes

that minorities need to become part of the mainstream culture (Berry, 1997). The lack of education and research surrounding acculturation is astounding and indicative that the United States holds a parochial notion that will continue to prevent populations such as Mexican-American first generation college students from accessing the resources they need to succeed. We need to change the way we study acculturation and choose to leverage that knowledge in order to serve these populations with culturally competent resources and diagnoses.

Until more tools are developed, individuals seeking healthcare and education resources will continue to battle with inconsistent acculturation measurement methods and inequitable access to resources. The purpose of this thesis project was to provide Mexican-American, first generation college students with access to existing research and with a curricular outline of a workshop to help educate them on the impact that acculturation is having on their own educational pursuits and their access to equitable resources. Included in the appendix of this thesis is the outline for a workshop that explains the impact of acculturation on first generation college students and types of assessment tools available. The action piece of this thesis was designed with the idea in mind that ultimately, education on these issues is the key to empowering students to take ownership of their acculturation journey with the hope of maximizing success and access to resources in their collegiate endeavors.

The research done here reminds us that the lack of acculturative knowledge that education and healthcare professionals possess negatively impacts first generation Mexican-American student's access to equitable educational and healthcare resources. There are more problems with the way we serve these students than there are solutions, yet a more personalized, detailed assessment of where an individual is on their acculturative journey could provide more culturally competent resources for these first generation Mexican-American students. Let this

research be a call to action for researchers, educators and healthcare professionals to reassess the way they choose to interact with Mexican-American, first generation college students.

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Appendix A

Acculturation Workshop Outline and Talking Points (90 minutes)

Welcome (10 minutes)

- Introduction of presenter
- Check ins with attendees (Rose/Thorn)
- Establish discussion guidelines

Acculturation (5 minutes)

- Selena quote *"We have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, both at the same time! It's exhausting. Nobody knows how tough it is being a Mexican-American."*

Discussion

What does this statement mean to you?
Have you ever felt misunderstood by a healthcare professional or by an educator?

The role of Mexican-Americans in the United States (5 minutes)

- 2000 and 2010 the Mexican origin population in the United States increased by 54 percent
- This population's growth from 20.6 million to 31.8 million in a ten-year span only begins to demonstrate the importance of continued research on how these populations adjust to United States customs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).
- At DePaul, the 2016-2017 school year was the first year on record where administration intentionally hired mental health counselors of color after student demands for counselors who understood the intersectional experience of the individual reached an all-time high

What is Acculturation? (5 minutes)

- Acculturation theory suggests that when groups of individuals from different cultures interact with one another, individuals will exhibit changes in their manifestation of the original cultural constructs caused by the presence of both groups (Redfield, Linton and Herskovitz, 1936).
- It is the process of negotiating the adoption of another culture.
- Therefore, the more of a culture that an individual is exposed to, the more likely they are demonstrate behavioral and cognitive changes from the acculturative process.
- The depth of these changes depends on the willingness of the host and original culture to participate and engage in the acculturative process (McDermott-Levy, 2009).
- Acculturation is largely contingent upon the experience of the individual and the cultures they are negotiating between—there is no overarching, singular acculturative experience.

How do we measure acculturation? (10 minutes)

- Bidimensional models of acculturation support the choice of immigrants to choose to what extent they will adopt the new culture (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk, 2003).
- Popular bidimensional models of acculturation include John Berry's (1990) four-mode process to acculturation that consists of marginalization, separation, integration and assimilation.
- This model enables individuals to adopt a new culture at their own pace and supports the possibility of maintaining their original cultural identity in selected spaces and exhibiting behavior of assimilation in others.
    - Assimilation is when individuals relinquish their cultural identity in an effort to quickly adopt the host culture's norms.
    - Separation occurs where individuals hold onto their culture and avoid the host culture (Berry, 1997).
    - Integration, is when aspects of both cultures are embraced and the individual holds an ongoing negotiation between both cultures.
    - Marginalization depicts another extreme exhibited by acculturating populations where interactions with either culture are not possible nor desired (Berry, 1997).

Reflection

What phase of acculturation do you see yourself in? Why?
Are you in the same phase as your parents?

Mexican Cultural Constructs (10 minutes)

- Familism and fatalism have proven to be two of the more influential constructs leveraged by other researchers studying acculturation.
- Familism refers to the emotional support offered to individuals within Mexican culture and is arguably one of the most important constructs of Mexican culture (Moore, 1970; Cuellar et al. 1995).
- When it comes to the acknowledgement of familism, Rodriguez et al. (2007) found that there was a positive correlation between the support familism affords individuals and an individual's success.
- However, this success was contingent upon the acceptance of Mexican cultural identity that is often defined by familism. Researchers have suggested that the support networks individuals through have access to because of familism actually aid individuals as they adapt to another culture and have proven to positively impact their mental health and psychological development (Keefe, Padilla and Carlos 1979).

Reflection

Do you feel support by your family?
What role do they play in your everyday life?

Mexican Cultural Constructs (cont.)

- Fatalism, another key determinant in the process of acculturation is an indicator of how an individual distressful approaches situations.
- Cuellar et al. (1995), defines fatalism as the factor that determines how much a population believes that their fate is out of their control.
- This cultural construct can often manifest itself in the form of a reliance on the forces of fate.

Reflection

Does fatalism play a role in the way you approach problems?
Do your parent's religious preferences influence your decisions?

Bridging the Gap (10 minutes)

- As previously mentioned, underlying issues with these cultural constructs is the fact that existing research fails to adequately identify and name the scope of their impact.
- Familism and fatalism exhibit prominence due to the correlation between these two constructs and two cultural dimensions within Geert Hofstede's definition of national culture.
- Familism is equated with the individualism dimension and fatalism is equated with the uncertainty avoidance dimension.
- When looking at Hofstede's comparison of Mexico and the United States, two of the starkest differences in national culture are found within the individualism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions.
- On a one hundred-point scale Mexico ranks 30 against the United States who comes in at 91 on the individualism dimension (Hofstede, 2001). The higher the score on the individualism dimension the higher a nation's preference for a loosely-knot social framework and an individual's tendency to think in the "I" mindset versus the "we" (Hofstede, 2001).
- Another difference is seen when comparing Mexico and the United States on uncertainty avoidance levels; here Mexico scores an 82 in contrast to the United States' 46 (Hofstede, 2001).
- With this cultural dimension the higher the score the larger extent to which a country feels threatened by the unknown and thus enforces rigid rules and belief systems, such as faith as a way to navigate the ambiguous situations they may face (Hofstede, 2001).

Discussion

Do these differences surprise you?

Did you Know? Acculturation's impact on access to resources (10 minutes)

- The cultural constructs of familism and fatalism have also been shown to influence acculturating first generation Mexican-Americans.
- First generation college are empowered by the familial connections they are able to maintain in their collegiate journey.

- Despite only 6 percent of Mexican-Americans in the United States holding a bachelor's degree, this population flourishes under the support of their familial network and leverages that social support as a motive to obtain a degree to both advance the family and make the network proud.
- Furthermore, familism in the collegiate world can positively influence the student's focus by providing them with a intersectional role, that combats their sense of alienation on campus, highlights their ties to their home life and serves as an extension of their familial tendencies to help them engage with new communities found in college (Benmayor, 2012).
- If a student is allotted the space to expand their familial network to professionals spaces on campus the negotiation between the two cultures becomes easier

Reflection

Do you feel as though you have access to a space where you can embrace your culture?
What does this space mean to you?
What would your experience without this space look like?

Overcoming Barriers (10 minutes)

- While the first step to helping students overcome perceived barriers to success and resources is to understand how the student's culture influences the root of these barriers, the next step in culturally competent service is recognizing the different ways that students choose to navigate those perceived barriers.
- McWhirter et al. (2007), suggest that the conflicting desires of remaining close to family and pursuing academic interests that may be geographically separate from family leads to these perceived barriers and thus resulting in lowered self-efficacy.
- A low self-efficacy desire then dictates the behaviors and imitative a student will take in fulfilling their individual goals. The self-efficacy issue draws us back to the role fatalism plays in an acculturating individual's undergraduate journey.
- Fatalism and a low self-efficacy are one in the same and both adversely affect the power a student believes they hold over a specific situation.
- This can manifest itself in a number of ways, for example, because of the responsibility that students feel they have to their family they may feel as though certain barriers caused by family are perceived as a result of fate, a notion which can lead to students defaulting to fatalistic behaviors and accepting the barrier as something that is out of their control.

Reflection

Has an educator ever failed to misunderstand your choices?
What do you need to feel empowered?

The key here is cultural intelligence gathered from an understanding of how cultural constructs influence the decision making process when it comes to students seeking out help and resources. In addition to this, educators and healthcare professionals must not forget that culturally competent service to these populations is a two part process, understanding of the factors

impacted by acculturation and an assessment of where a student stands on their acculturative journey.

Goal setting Activity (10 minutes)

- What are three goals you would like to set to help your peers better understand the changes they are going through?
- What are ways we can build community to embrace your intersectional identity?

Closing (3 minutes)

Until more tools are developed, individuals seeking healthcare and education resources will continue to battle with inconsistent acculturation measurement methods and inequitable access to resources and the only way to successful fight that battle is to educate ourselves and our peers on the impact acculturation has on our lives.