

The Influence of Ethnicity on Evaluations of College Students' Future Success and
Behavior

Jasmine Portales

Faculty Mentor: Karol Maybury

University of Maine at Farmington

Abstract

Previous research has focused on the effects ethnicity has on self-perceptions. Stereotypes have shown to affect academic performance and campus experience. Both negative and positive stereotypes have shown to additionally affect self-esteem in the classroom which can potentially create more pressure for minority students. This study aimed to examine the effects ethnicity (Latino) has on perceptions of college students' academic success and behavior. There were two conditions under which individuals were examined. Participants received a short scenario depicting a male about to enter college. The male was either Caucasian or Latino in the story. Participants completed a questionnaire based on what they had read. Participants rated Jose ($M=2.13$, $SD=1.01$) as more likely to join a gang than Ryan ($M=1.53$, $SD=.624$); with a t-test confirming a significant difference: $t(38)=-2.31$, $p<.05$. Implications of the findings are discussed.

The Influence of Ethnicity on Evaluations of College Students' Future Success and Behavior

Do ethnicity and race impact peoples' perception of success? Blustein, Murphy, Kenny, Jernigan, Pérez-Gualdrón, Castañeda, Koepke, Land, and Urbano (2010) examined the narratives of 32 high school students and their perceptions of how their race/ethnicity influenced society's expectations of them and their future successes. Blustein et al., (2010) found students believe society had little-to-no expectations for them based on their race and ethnicity. Students also expressed ambivalent feelings about how their racial and ethnic background would have an influence over their future success. This seems to indicate that society's perceptions of race and ethnicity have an impact on an individual's perception of self.

Museus (2008) explored the impact of racial stereotypes in shaping the college experiences of minority students. He focused on Asian-American and African-American students, which he stated were the most commonly stereotyped groups. He focused on the myths of "model minority and the inferior minority" (p. 3), used to label Asian-Americans and African-Americans, respectively (Museus, 2008). Asian-American students are seen as academically superior, while African-American students are stereotyped as academically inferior. These labels pressure students to conform to the stereotypes or act against them.

Similarly, in an experiment done by Cheryan and Bodenhausen (2000), the authors tested the notion that positive stereotypes, like negative stereotypes, can affect performance by creating anxiety about meeting high expectations. The experiment consisted of Asian-American individuals, as they are stereotypically seen as being

academically superior. The authors found that even positive stereotypes can affect academic performance negatively. The participants that were placed in the ethnicity-salient condition had more trouble concentrating which caused them to perform poorly. For the reason that Cheryan and Bodenhausen used a method that caused participants to think about how their ethnic group is viewed by society, their focus was more concentrated on the possibility of failing to live up to the positive stereotypes. Therefore, even stereotypes that are meant to be positive, can negatively impact academic performance.

Ford (1997) conducted an experiment that tested the idea that stereotypical television interpretations of African-Americans increase negative perceptions of African-Americans by white people. The experiment consisted of forty white participants randomly assigned to watching a comedy skit containing stereotypical portrayal or neutral portrayals of African-American characters. They then read a short case and make judgments on what they read. Half of the subjects read the case with a stereotypical African-American subject while the other half read the case that used a name typically associated with white males. Ford found that when white people are exposed to negative portrayals of an African-American, they are more likely to have negative perceptions of an African-American target person. He also found that negative portrayals of an African-American individual do not affect their perceptions of a white target person, which he evaluated from the case.

Previous research has also shown that minority groups encounter different experiences and often have different perspectives of campus culture. Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr (2000) examined perceptions and experience of campus culture by African-

American, Asian-American, Latino/a, and Caucasian students. Using the Cultural Attitudes and Climate Questionnaire, they analyzed racial tension, cross-cultural comfort, diversity awareness, racial pressures, residence hall tension, fair treatment, faculty racism, respect for other cultures, lack of support, comfort with own culture, and overall satisfaction (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000) . They found significant ethnic and racial differences in perceptions and experiences of campus cultural climate. African-Americans reported more negative experiences than any other group. They reported greater racial-ethnic hostility, greater pressure to conform to stereotypes, less treatment by faculty, staff, and teaching assistants, and more faculty racism (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). Interesting results about this study were that Latinos reported they experienced less racism and less racial-ethnic conflict, though they did report experiences of unfair treatment, stereotyping, and pressure to conform to stereotypes. However, there were a few noted factors that could have affected these results. Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr (2000) described that Latinos, from the university where the study was done, were less represented than other groups. Therefore, the limited number of Latino students may have prevented them from being seen as threats, and so were possibly not discriminated against as much as any other minority group. The results might have been different if the population of Latino students on campus was much larger.

Galinsky, Hall, & Cuddy's (Columbia Business School, 2012) research discussed not only racial stereotypes, but the overlapping of race and gender stereotypes and how the overlaps impacts decisions made. The experiment involved 85 participants that

completed a survey that evaluated whether traits were masculine or feminine, or if traits attributed to Asians, whites, and African-Americans. The experiment showed that African-Americans were found to be more masculine, followed by Caucasians and Asians as less masculine. This signified an overlap of racial and gender stereotypes. Their data supports the notion that intersectional stereotypes are highly influential of our perceptions and decisions. However, for the purposes of this current study, focus will be placed on the influence of ethnicity on assessing students' behavior and academic performance.

Method

Two surveys were used for the purpose of this study. The two types included all the same information; the same scenario content and the same questions following the short scenario. The difference between the scenarios was the names used.

Participants

Participants were recruited in person from a few different psychology classes at the University of Maine at Farmington. Individuals were also recruited through the online Sona Systems for the Psychology department. All the students recruited, either online or in-person, were given credit for their participation. Additional participants were recruited through the survey website *Kwiksurveys.com*, but due to a few minor errors on the survey these questionnaires were left out from the final analysis. There were a total of forty participants in the final analysis.

Materials

The study consisted of a short scenario and a questionnaire. The scenario depicted a male fresh out of high school who was nervous and excited about starting college for the first time. The story also referred to his high school experience and outside interests. The study consisted of two conditions therefore; participants either received the scenario with the name Jose or Ryan. Everything about the scenario remained the same other than the name. The participants used a 1-5 Likert scale (1- very unlikely, 5- very likely) to rate twenty-six actions and traits that may or may not apply to the male in the scenario. In the final analysis, only eleven of the actions and traits were used; as the rest of them were used as dummy questions to hide the hypothesis from participants. Participants were asked to rate how likely Jose or Ryan were to: show up late to class, consume alcohol, use drugs, join a gang, get arrested, have a lot of sexual partners, skip class, get into fights easily, work in manual labor, cheat on his partner, and succeed academically.

Procedure

In order to decrease as much bias as possible in this study (due to the ethnicity of the experimenter), a different researcher was used to carry out the experiment. The experimenter instructed each participant to read the scenario first and the scenarios with the different names (Jose or Ryan) were handed out randomly to each participant. After reading the scenario, each participant was instructed to answer each question based on what they had read about the male in the story.

Results

The data collected was then examined and inserted into the Systat program. There were two independent variables, Ryan and Jose, and eleven dependent variables the actions and traits that were judged on the questionnaire. Multiple t-tests were conducted with the eleven dependent variables. The data found ten t-tests lacking significant difference and there was one significant difference found in the data, see Table 1. Participants had rated Jose ($M=2.13$, $SD=1.01$) as more likely to join a gang than Ryan ($M=1.53$, $SD=.624$); with a t-test confirming a significant difference: $t(38)=-2.31$, $p.<.05$.

Discussion

This study indicated that ethnicity, specifically Latino ethnicity, affected the way in which people perceived a college student's academic success and personality, especially by non-Latinos. The belief was that stereotypes would affect how people viewed and judged others. The results did not completely support the hypothesis in this study. There were no significant differences in ten of the eleven variables. The one significant difference, where participants rated Jose as more likely than Ryan to join a gang, could possibly lend support to how the ethnicity of a student could affect people's perceptions of Latino students. This could potentially support that participants had set opinions, judgments, or beliefs about Latinos before participating in this study. This would bring to light the effects of stereotypes and how strongly they could affect perceptions and impressions of minority groups.

A great quantity of research in this area has demonstrated the affect ethnicity has on person perception. Previous research has found that ethnicity affects perceptions of

success of other students. Museus (2008) studied Asian-American and African-American students and how stereotypes affected not only other people's perceptions of them but also how they themselves internalized those perceptions. He found that because Asian-American students were perceived as academically superior and African-American students were seen as academically inferior, there would be pressure to conform or rebel against these stereotypes.

While other research has demonstrated the effects that the perceptions of ethnicity have on individuals' success, this study aimed to examine whether ethnicity affects people's perceptions of academic success. This is particularly important because of the implications of those perceptions. Gyll, Madon, Prieto & Scherr (2010) studied the potential effects of self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threats on education. All three could potentially increase ethnic salience in Latino students and affect academic performance. Stereotypes can threaten Latino students' perceptions of themselves and affect how well they succeed. Stereotypes could also affect how much financial aid Latinos receive, or it could affect their chances of being admitted into a college or university.

Furthermore, help in accessing resources to further their education can be greatly affected as well. Vela-Gude, Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Campos & Rodriguez (2009) studied the lack of counseling received by Latino students in high school. School counselors usually provide students with help in accessing information about college and what needs to be done to further succeed beyond high school. In their study, however, Latino students experienced insufficient help from their counselors. Vela-Gude, Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Campos & Rodriguez

(2009) identified the following five themes in their research: (1) inadequate advisement; (2) lack of availability; (3) lack of individual counseling; (4) differential treatment; and (5) low expectations or setting limits. Insufficient help can profoundly affect Latino students' desire to even ask for help and have access to needed information.

The ways in which access to education, opportunities, and aid are presented or marketed to Latinos is another vital implication of these findings. Attitudes of professors and students might intensely affect Latino students' success. Lastly, it could affect the way that Latinos integrate themselves in the community and campus life. Research by Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Dittmann & Lagunes (2010) supports this implication. In the study they found that certain characteristics (in their study they examined accents) could have a strong effect on their sense of belonging. Behaviors or personality traits that signal ethnic difference could potentially affect Latino students' sense of belonging on campus, which could furthermore affect their performance in class and their overall sense of satisfaction.

One possible confounding variable that could have affected the study is the comparatively small population of Latinos on the campus on which this data was collected (University of Maine at Farmington). They are not largely represented and therefore, could have some effect on the perceptions of the participants in the study. Another variable could be participants having an idea of what they hypothesis is, for whatever reason, and answering the questions according to how they think they should be answered.

Further research should be done about where these stereotypes derive from and how they are perpetuated. Focus should be placed on how media impacts the opinions and judgments toward Latinos, since media is easily and widely accessible and consumed by people. Ford's (1997) research supports how media, specifically television, has a strong effect on perceptions of minority groups. Additionally, more should be done on the obstacles perceived by Latino students themselves. Similarly, Becerra (2012) explored parent's perceptions of educational barriers on Latino students. If research can be done to find barriers and problems that affect Latino students' education as identified *by* Latino students themselves more can be done to help them have access to educational resources and succeed, despite stereotypes. It would also be interesting to see research that examines familiarity and interactions with Latinos and whether that has an impact on the perceptions by non-Latinos. Would that maybe explain the perpetuation of stereotypes? Do people buy into these stereotypes simply because they don't actually know any Latinos? Research could then be done measuring interactions and contact with Latinos by non-Latinos and examine whether that could have an influence on perception.

References

- Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student Perceptions of Campus Cultural Climate by Race. *Journal Of Counseling & Development*, 78(2), 180-185.
- Becerra, D. (2012). Perceptions of Educational Barriers Affecting the Academic Achievement of Latino K12 Students. *Children & Schools*, 34(3), 167-177.
- Blustein, D. L., Murphy, K. A., Kenny, M. E., Jernigan, M., Pérez-Gualdrón, L., Castañeda, T., & Davis, O. (2010). Exploring Urban Students' Constructions About School, Work, Race, and Ethnicity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(2), 248-254.
- Cheryan, S., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2000). When Positive Stereotypes Threaten Intellectual Performance: The Psychological Hazards of 'Model Minority' Status. *Psychological Science (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 11(5), 399.
- Columbia Business School (2012, December 3). Gender and race: How overlapping stereotypes affect our personal and professional decisions. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved April 17, 2013, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/12/121203131702.htm>.
- Dovidio, J. F., Gluszek, A., John, M., Dittmann, R., & Lagunes, P. (2010). Understanding Bias toward Latinos: Discrimination, Dimensions of Difference, and Experience of Exclusion. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66(1), 59-78.
- Ford, E. T. (1997). Effects of Stereotypical Television Portrayals of African Americans on Person Perception. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 60 (3), 266-275.
- Guyll, M., Madon, S., Prieto, L., & Scherr, K. C. (2010). The Potential Roles of Self Fulfilling Prophecies, Stigma Consciousness, and Stereotype Threat in Linking Latino/a Ethnicity and Educational Outcomes. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66(1), 113-130.
- Museum, S. D. (2008). The model minority and the inferior minority myths: Understanding stereotypes and their implications for student learning. *About Campus*, 13(3), 2-8.
- Vela-Gude, L., Cavazos, J. r., Johnson, M. B., Fielding, C., Cavazos, A. G., Campos, L., & Rodriguez, I. (2009). "My Counselors Were Never There": Perceptions from

Latino College Students. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(4), 272-279.

Table 1.

Variable	Condition	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	p-Value
Skip Class	Ryan	17.000	2.529	0.717	0.143
	Jose	23.000	2.217	0.600	
Fights	Ryan	17.000	1.941	0.659	0.415
	Jose	23.000	2.130	0.747	
Manual Labor	Ryan	17.000	2.647	0.862	0.318
	Jose	23.000	2.913	0.793	
Cheater	Ryan	17.000	2.235	0.752	0.920
	Jose	23.000	2.261	0.810	
Academic Success	Ryan	17.000	4.059	0.556	0.493
	Jose	23.000	4.174	0.491	
Late Class	Ryan	17.000	2.294	0.920	0.446
	Jose	23.000	2.478	0.593	
Alcohol	Ryan	17.000	2.412	0.618	0.419
	Jose	23.000	2.609	0.839	
Drug Use	Ryan	17.000	2.353	0.931	0.308
	Jose	23.000	2.652	0.885	
Arrest	Ryan	17.000	1.941	0.827	0.073
	Jose	23.000	2.435	0.843	
Sexual Partners	Ryan	17.000	2.706	0.849	0.067
	Jose	23.000	3.174	0.717	
Gang	Ryan	17.000	1.529	0.624	0.037
	Jose	23.000	2.130	1.014	