

The Potential Roles of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies, Stigma Consciousness, and Stereotype Threat in Linking Latino/a Ethnicity and Educational Outcomes

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Acculturation and ethnic identity may be associated with Latino/as' educational outcomes and be relevant to their lower levels of academic achievement. This article explores how these relationships might be mediated by considering several empirically supported and theory-based social psychological processes—the self-fulfilling prophecy, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat. These processes suggest specific mediational mechanisms that remain largely unexamined, thereby offering novel directions for research and the potential to enrich understanding of the relationship between Latino/a ethnicity and academic performance. Consideration of these mediational mechanisms suggests that some groups within the Latino/a population face even greater challenges with regard to educational achievement. Accordingly, the particular difficulties encountered by Latinas and the children of families of migrant workers and new and undocumented immigrants are discussed. In addition, the potential relevance of education policies to the operation of the reviewed processes is explored.

Latino/as in the United States face a number of challenges regarding education and lag behind their Euro-American counterparts in terms of academic achievement. Educational disparities for Latino/as begin in preschool and are evident at all subsequent markers of achievement, including decreased rates of attaining undergraduate and graduate degrees (Fry, 2003; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Verdugo, 2006). The cited reports review the multiple sociological and economic barriers faced by Latino/as and highlight limited English proficiency (LEP) as a major hurdle to academic success. Because English is the predominant language

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of instruction in U.S. public education, LEP directly interferes with the learning process.

In addition to its direct effect on academics, language use by U.S. Latino/as is also related to generational status, and both of these factors are connected to broader constructs tied to Latino/a ethnicity and culture. In particular, research has identified Latino/a acculturation and ethnic identity as predictors of academic performance. However, beyond their relationship to LEP little empirical work has entailed testing specific, theory-based models that detail other mechanisms. The present article addresses this issue by exploring how self-fulfilling prophecy, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat processes could mediate relations between these cultural factors and Latino/a achievement. These processes may be especially relevant to Latino/as in the United States because current public and political debate surrounding the issues of immigration, employment, education, crime, terrorism, and border security often demonize individuals who happen to be Latino/a and by implication portray Latino/as as a group to be a threat to the United States (Immigration Policy Center, 2008; Zárate & Shaw, this issue). The tolerance of unabashed anti-Latino/a rhetoric in the public discourse combined with the increasing size and visibility of Latino/as in the United States are likely to provoke greater stereotyping, prejudice, stigmatization and discrimination against Latino/as, setting the stage for these processes to occur.

In this article, we consider acculturation and ethnic identity and review research connecting them to Latino/a educational outcomes. We then describe self-fulfilling prophecy, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat processes and detail how each could mediate the relationship between Latino/a cultural factors and academic achievement. Finally, we consider how these processes may especially affect particular Latino/a groups, and how their effects may combine with social policy to further hinder Latino/as' opportunities for academic success.

Cultural Factors

Acculturation. *Acculturation* refers to adaptational changes that result from immigrants' contact with a host culture (Berry, 2003). The acculturation strategies of assimilation and biculturalism are characterized by positive engagement with the host culture, with biculturalism also including maintenance of a strong connection to one's heritage culture. The acculturation strategy of separation is characterized by strong heritage culture ties and little host culture adaptation (Berry, 2003). Thus, biculturalism and assimilation correspond to a large degree of acculturation, and separation reflects little acculturation.

A number of investigations have examined the relationship between acculturation and academic outcomes among U.S. Latino/as. Two studies of Latinas found that less orientation to U.S. culture and a poorer fit with university culture

predicted greater perceived barriers to college education (Castellanos & Fujitsuho, 1997; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). Foreign-born Latino/as are less acculturated and have worse educational outcomes (Ibañez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Perilla, 2004; López, Ehly, & García-Vázquez, 2002). With regard to language use, LEP speakers are less acculturated and fare worse than those who possess greater English proficiency (e.g., Buriel & Cardoza, 1988; Feliciano, 2001; Fry, 2003; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Thus, a low degree of acculturation tends to be associated with worse academic outcomes.

Ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is an element of one's self concept and, as such, corresponds to how one's membership in an ethnic group contributes to one's identity (Phinney, 2003). Ethnic identity conveys one's attachment to their ethnic group, indicating how positive and important group membership is to the individual. Ethnic identity is fluid and can change with age or in response to situations. Consequently, factors such as immigrating, being in the statistical minority, or interacting with host culture institutions like schools and colleges could affect ethnic identity or moderate its influence.

The research linking ethnic identity to educational outcomes is somewhat inconsistent. A number of studies focusing on adolescents have found greater ethnic identity to be associated with better academic performance and attitudes (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006; Perreira, Fuligni, & Potochnick, this issue; Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007; Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005). Others have shown that ethnic identity is associated with worse college attitudes and adjustment (Castillo et al., 2006; Schneider & Ward, 2003). Interestingly, the negative associations tend to emerge among college samples and might reflect environmental moderation, a point we return to later.

Potential Mediators and Mechanisms

The links between acculturation, ethnic identity, and educational outcomes raise the question as to what underlies these associations. We consider the potential roles of self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat because each reflects a core theme of social psychology by specifying how beliefs and expectations shape behavior and performance. These processes are relevant to Latino/as who bring their own culturally influenced norms, attitudes, and behaviors to academic environments embedded in the host culture and are thus confronted by individuals with different beliefs and assumptions. To understand how this could undermine performance, we consider how variables relevant to acculturation and ethnic identity could initiate or strengthen self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat to influence Latino/as' educational outcomes.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a perceiver's false belief influences the perceiver's treatment of a target which, in turn, shapes the target's behavior in an expectancy-consistent manner (Merton, 1948). Thus, the process consists of three steps. First, a perceiver must hold a false belief about a target, as when a teacher underestimates a student's true potential. Second, the perceiver must treat the target in a manner that is consistent with the false belief, such as if a teacher presents easier material to low-expectancy students (Rosenthal, 1973). Finally, the target must confirm the originally false belief, as when a low-expectancy student underperforms.

The self-fulfilling prophecy has historically been linked to social problems by virtue of its ability to create social inequality, decrease academic achievement of minority students, and fuel discrimination (e.g., Merton, 1948; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). Similarly, self-fulfilling prophecies can have long-term and negative influences on the outcomes of targets who are perceived unfavorably, ultimately widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Madon, Willard, Guyll, Trudeau, & Spoth, 2006; Rist, 1970).

Although we are not aware of any research showing that self-fulfilling prophecies shape the academic achievement of Latino/a youth in particular, a recent meta-analysis found that teachers do hold lower expectations for Latino/a students than for Euro-American students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). In addition, Hill and Torres (this issue) make clear how cultural differences can contribute to the development of negative beliefs on the part of school personnel. Therefore, it is conceivable that variables related to acculturation and ethnic identity could lead perceivers to develop more negative beliefs about Latino/as' academic abilities, which would set the stage for self-fulfilling processes. In particular, acculturation status and ethnic identity could lead perceivers to develop false beliefs about Latino/a students that are either target based (inferred from personal information) or stereotype based (inferred from a stereotype).

Target-based beliefs. Acculturation-related variables may cause perceivers to develop false target-based beliefs about Latino/a students. For example, LEP interferes with students' ability to understand the curriculum, thus leading to poor performance. However, school personnel may incorrectly ascribe the poor performance to lower intelligence or motivation (Ross, 1977), thereby initiating a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby students are offered less challenging instruction, fewer opportunities, and less information about educational and career paths.

Self-fulfilling processes could also begin with classmates who treat the LEP student differently, such as by being resistant to working collaboratively, or not

facilitating the LEP student's participation because of communication difficulties. Such treatment might cause the Latino/a student to disengage from school, reduce motivation, and internalize the misperception that she or he lacks academic ability (Eccles & Wigfield, 1985; Madon et al., 2008).

Acculturation may also influence Latino/as' educational outcomes via parent-teacher interactions. Less acculturated Latino/a parents view high parental involvement in school-related matters as an affront to the teacher's authority and their lower engagement may be misperceived as a lack of concern about their child's education (Hill & Torres, this issue). Also, when cultural differences exist, teachers make less effort to involve parents, and perceive parents to value education less (Epstein & Dauber, 1991), which in turn is associated with perceiving the children to be less intelligent (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003; Hill & Craft, 2003). Therefore, low acculturation can trigger misunderstandings regarding parental roles and negative beliefs about children's academic potential, which could trigger a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Stereotype-based beliefs. Factors associated with being less acculturated might also lead school personnel to rely on inaccurate stereotypes. Though myriad factors promote stereotyping, among the strongest is limited target information (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). When people interact with others who are not proficient in their language, their ability to know one another is impaired. Thus, LEP may reduce the extent to which school personnel can obtain personal information about Latino/a youth, and increase their reliance on stereotypes. As a result, school personnel may place a student in remedial classes, or avoid contacting parents, believing they won't be supportive, thereby increasing the chance that the student will underperform.

Less acculturation and stronger ethnic identity might encourage school personnel and peers to engage in stereotyping as a way to elaborate their impressions. Several perspectives in the stereotype literature suggest that perceivers sometimes use stereotypes as supplemental sources of information about targets (e.g., Madon, Gyll, Hilbert, Kyriakatos, & Vogel, 2006; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Spears & Haslam, 1997). For example, Madon et al. (2006) found that perceivers used stereotypes to elaborate their impressions when the stereotype was considered valid, and when targets' personal characteristics matched the stereotype. Less acculturated and more ethnically identified Latino/a students tend to exhibit heritage culture attributes that differentiate them from the majority culture (Carter & Pieterse, 2005). Perceivers may interpret these distinguishing attributes as validating the stereotype for judging a specific individual. Given that the Latino/a stereotype characterizes Latino/a as intellectually inferior (Niemann, 2001), greater reliance on the stereotype may negatively bias impressions of their academic ability, leading to false beliefs, differential treatment, and lower achievement.

It is also possible that stereotyping and prejudice do not initiate a self-fulfilling prophecy straightaway but rather lead school personnel to subjectively evaluate a Latino/a student's performance in a biased fashion, such as through assigning grades that are lower than the student's actual achievement. In this situation, grades would not reflect a self-fulfilling process because they do not correspond to actual decreased achievement, but rather an inaccurate evaluation (Jussim, 1991). The inaccurate evaluation, however, becomes part of the student's record, which could then lead subsequent perceivers to form false beliefs about the student, setting the stage for differential treatment and self-fulfilling prophecies that occur at a later point in time. For instance, undeservedly poor grades would decrease later educational opportunities. Thus, the self-fulfilling process could occur in a piecemeal fashion; one perceiver creates false information, and subsequent perceivers assume that information to be accurate and utilize it as a basis for making decisions that decrease the student's opportunities for academic achievement.

Stigma Consciousness

Stigma consciousness is the extent to which people are self-conscious about being a member of a stereotyped group and expect to be stereotyped by others (Brown & Pinel, 2003). Although it can be situationally induced, stigma consciousness is most often conceptualized as an individual difference factor. Members of any stereotyped group can experience stigma consciousness, but research indicates that the most susceptible individuals are from groups that are negatively viewed and discriminated against (Pinel, 1999).

Stigma consciousness has been shown to influence a variety of perceptual and behavioral outcomes. People high in stigma consciousness perceive greater discrimination against themselves and other members of their group, believe their group membership influences their social interactions and experiences, and perceive negative and ambiguous feedback as discriminatory (Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003; Pinel, 2004; Pinel, Warner, & Chua, 2005). With respect to Latino/as in particular, stigma consciousness is associated with lower college grades and disengagement from school (Brown & Lee, 2005; Pinel et al., 2005).

Stigma consciousness may play a role in mediating the relationship between acculturation and ethnic identity and Latino/as' academic achievement by increasing the degree to which they perceive their ethnicity to be one of their salient characteristics. In the following sections, we discuss how this might occur and undermine achievement for Latino/a students.

Observable characteristics. Being less acculturated may increase ethnic salience because it entails having characteristics that differentiate Latino/a students from the majority culture (Carter & Pieterse, 2005). Such differences could lead to differential treatment by Euro-Americans, which students notice and correctly

attribute to their ethnicity, thereby increasing their experience of ethnic salience. In addition, students with LEP or who possess characteristics otherwise distinctive of their heritage culture may perceive themselves as different from their Euro-American classmates. This perception may lead Latino/a students to infer that others take particular note of their ethnicity. Accordingly, students who feel ethnically salient because of characteristics linked to their ethnicity or heritage culture may believe that others are cognizant of their ethnic group and minority status as well and, therefore, likely to judge them in terms of their ethnicity and its stereotype, thereby increasing stigma consciousness. As a result, these students may perceive greater discrimination against themselves and other Latino/a students. The perception that ethnic discrimination characterizes cross-cultural social interactions could reduce trust, and increase discomfort in interpersonal interactions (e.g., Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002). Thus, stigma-conscious students may not seek out and use all available sources of educational support such as guidance counselors, tutors, or teaching assistants. A reluctance to take advantage of these sources of support together with the school's failure to provide effective outreach may undermine students' ability to reach their full potential.

Social information processing. Ethnic identity may increase ethnic salience by influencing Latino/a students' processing of social information. Drawing on the idea that ascribed identities can be viewed as self-schemas, ethnic identity may be conceptualized as an element of one's self-schema (Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003). Because self-schemas are psychological structures that entail an organized set of clearly held and personally valued beliefs about the self that can influence social information processing (Markus, 1977), a strong ethnic identity could cause people to process self-relevant information in relation to their ethnicity. Accordingly, Latino/a students with strong ethnic identities may be more apt to attend to, recall, interpret and organize social information in terms of their ethnicity. Consequently, Latino/a students with strong ethnic identities may perceive large differences between themselves and Euro-Americans, and perceive the words and actions of their Euro-American teachers and peers as having been influenced by their Latino/a ethnicity. Such perceptions could increase ethnic salience and encourage stigma consciousness.

Once stigma consciousness is in place, it has the potential to influence information processing. For example, it might cause Latino/a students to interpret ambiguous and negative feedback as discriminatory (Pinel, 2004; Major et al., 2003). This processing bias has important implications because it suggests that stigma conscious Latino/a students may discount evaluative feedback. However, because feedback is an important component of learning that can serve to improve students' performance, such a tendency could ultimately reduce academic skills.

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is the fear that one's behavior may confirm or be understood in terms of a negative stereotype associated with one's social group (Steele, 1997). Stereotype threat decreases performance on tasks that are associated with a stereotype-relevant domain because it generates a disruptive pressure akin to anxiety (Smith, 2004; Steele, 1997; Wheeler & Petty, 2001). These disruptive effects may be conveyed by physiological stress responses, as well as cognitive and affective efforts spent on monitoring performance and suppressing negative thoughts (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). Stereotype threat has most often been examined as a way to understand the achievement gap between minorities and Euro-Americans in academics, and between women and men in math and science. Research indicates that minorities underperform relative to Euro-Americans on achievement tests (and women underperform on math achievement tests) only when the tests are described as diagnostic of ability (e.g., Steele, 1997). Individuals who repeatedly contend with stereotype threat may come to devalue performance in academics and instead come to value and gain self-esteem from other domains that are less threatening to their identity, a process referred to as disidentification (Steele, 1997).

We propose that stereotype threat may have larger effects among Latino/a students who are less acculturated or have stronger ethnic identities because the Latino/a stereotype is more readily activated in the minds of these individuals, thereby increasing vulnerability to stereotype threat. Also, under stereotype threat conditions, stronger ethnic identity may increase the threat experienced because presenting one's group in a positive light is more valued. We next discuss these potential relations and their ability to undermine academic performance.

Stereotype activation. In order for stereotype threat to occur, a negative stereotype relevant to one's social group must be activated in the mind of the student. If this does not happen, then there is no stereotype to threaten the individual's identity and stereotype threat will not take place (Steele, 1997). With respect to Latino/a students, individual differences in stereotype activation may be associated with acculturation and ethnic identity. As noted in the discussion of stigma consciousness, less acculturation is associated with distinguishing characteristics, such as LEP (e.g., Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002; Niemann, 2001). Because Latino/a students are cognizant of these differences (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005), they will be more aware of the Latino/a stereotype. A strong ethnic identity may have a similar effect, although for different reasons. As previously noted, ethnic identity can be viewed as a self-schema that leads one to process social information in relation to their ethnicity, thereby facilitating activation of the Latino/a stereotype. Thus, when these students take an academic test,

for example, they may be especially likely to think about the Latino/a stereotype and to worry that their own test performance will confirm it.

Strength of stereotype threat. Conditions that promote stereotype threat could have a larger effect among those with stronger ethnic identities if these individuals experience the threat or anxiety more strongly. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) offers an explanation as to why this might be the case. It proposes that self-esteem is partly derived from the perception that one's group has value. Negative stereotypes threaten this perception because they bring to light the societal belief that one's social group is perceived as inferior. The more strongly an individual identifies with a social group, the more important it should be for the individual to perceive the group favorably, and the more threatening a negative stereotype of one's group will be (Schmader, 2002). Consistent with this idea, group identification moderates stereotype threat effects, in that negative effects are greatest among highly identified individuals (Deaux et al., 2007; Schmader, 2002). Thus, strong identification with a negatively stereotyped social group can increase one's vulnerability to stereotype threat.

Consequences of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat can lower performance, and such direct effects could produce additional consequences. First, teachers may falsely believe that poor performance reflects true ability, thereby setting a self-fulfilling prophecy in motion. Second, stereotype threat's negative effects on test scores could reduce a student's chances of gaining admission to a quality school. Third, a student who must repeatedly contend with stereotype threat may, over time, disidentify with academics. As discussed above, disidentification serves to distance one's identity from the threatening domain and, by so doing, strips away the desire and motivation to excel. Disidentification can influence student choices that fundamentally alter their education and career trajectories (Steele, 1997).

Summary

We have discussed how self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat might contribute to the relationship between Latino/a acculturation and ethnic identity and academic achievement. Although a number of scenarios have been offered to illustrate how these processes might unfold, they all reflect the influence of knowledge structures (e.g., stereotypes, self-views, social roles) on social information processing and judgments, the latter subsequently affecting individuals' behaviors in ways that impact educational outcomes. A further similarity is that early in each process the Latino/a student must be distinguished from other students on the basis of characteristics associated with acculturation and ethnic identity. Thus, prejudice and discrimination could function to potentiate all these processes by motivating prejudiced perceivers to rely more heavily on

negative stereotypes, make more negative judgments, and behave more negatively toward students who are more easily distinguished from others because they are less acculturated or have stronger ethnic identities. In addition, students' previous experiences with prejudice and discrimination may facilitate stigma consciousness and stereotype threat by increasing their awareness of their group's stereotype and stigmatized status.

The need to distinguish particular Latino/a students from others is also relevant to the previously noted inconsistency in the relationship between ethnic identity and educational outcomes, in which ethnic identity and educational outcomes tended to be positively related prior to entering college, but negatively related thereafter. One possibility is that high ethnic identity does not as strongly distinguish Latino/a students in primary and secondary school as it does in college. This seems plausible to the degree that ethnic identity is an intrapersonal quality that might not readily distinguish among Latino/a students, especially in the context of high minority neighborhood public schools, which Latino/a students characteristically attend (Fry, 2005). By contrast Latino/as constitute a small percentage of the university student body, a factor that could increase the relationship between ethnic identity and distinctiveness, particularly when rejection by the predominantly Euro-American community is expected (Mendoza-Denton, Pietrzak, & Downey, 2008). Acculturation, on the other hand, entails characteristics that are more easily observed, including language proficiency and social behaviors, which can differentiate among Latino/a students even in contexts where Latino/a ethnicity is not itself a distinctive feature.

Increased Relevance for Particular Groups

Particular groups within the broader Latino/a community could be especially susceptible to self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat. We consider in the following sections how the unique circumstances faced by Latinas and children of families of migrant workers and new and undocumented immigrants may further decrease academic performance through these processes.

Latinas. Latinas in the United States must not only negotiate two cultures, but also contend with gender roles and gender stereotypes. To the degree that gender roles and stereotypes both imply generalized expectations for and beliefs about women, they have the potential to additionally influence Latinas' choices, behaviors, and—ultimately—academic achievement. Specifically, these expectations cannot accurately describe the academic aspirations and potential of all Latinas and will, therefore, constitute false beliefs for some individuals, raising the possibility that self-fulfilling processes could hinder academic pursuits. For example, girls' roles in Latino/a families entail more responsibility (Valenzuela, 1999), requiring time and energy that is not then available for schoolwork. In addition,

the roles and activities encouraged for young girls could initiate developmental trajectories that shape girls' self-concepts and attitudes such that education is less valued, or that lead Latinas to take on enduring roles of responsibility that are incompatible with the time commitments necessary for academics. Similarly, parental expectations for a girl's future role could reduce parental encouragement and support for Latinas' education (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). The Latina gender role is also associated with the belief that they should remain geographically close to their family, an expectation that might limit Latinas' educational options (Rodriguez et al., 2000). In addition, school personnel might convey harmful self-fulfilling effects to the degree that they are influenced by the stereotype of Latinas as being submissive and lacking ambition (Niemann, 2001). Therefore, the gender roles and stereotypes relevant to Latinas could initiate a number of self-fulfilling prophecy effects in addition to those associated with their ethnicity.

Women from stereotyped groups might also be more vulnerable to the harmful effects of stigma consciousness. As previously discussed, stigma consciousness is the expectation that one will be stereotyped. Research indicates that Latinas' academic achievement is predicted by their interpersonal skills, ability to relate to the teacher and utilize guidance counselors (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005), suggesting the importance of interpersonal channels to Latinas in pursuing educational goals. This resource for academic advancement could be jeopardized to the degree that stigma consciousness damages cross-cultural relationships. In addition, women are particularly skillful at detecting and remembering a range of nonverbal communication (Hall, 1978; McClure, 2000). As a result, stigma conscious Latinas might be especially proficient at detecting prejudicial attitudes conveyed by subtle behavior during interpersonal interactions, regardless of whether the communication was intended or not.

Finally, Latinas face the threat associated with confirming the stereotype of not only their ethnic group, but also of their gender. A number of stereotype threat studies have documented that women experience stereotype threat effects with regard to math and science (Steele, 1997). Thus, Latinas may face stereotype threat effects from multiple directions that combine to create an even larger performance decrement. Gonzales et al. (2002) found that Latinas who were under stereotype threat conditions exhibited the greatest performance decrement of any group, suffering a greater decrease in performance than did Latino men.

Children of families of migrant workers, and new and undocumented immigrants. The geographic mobility of Latino/a migrant workers is a factor that could lead perceivers to rely more heavily on stereotypes and form false beliefs about their families and school age children. The less information perceivers' have about targets, the more their evaluations are influenced by stereotypes (Kunda

& Thagard, 1996). The transient nature of migrant workers' lives could limit the information teachers and other school personnel have to form accurate and detailed opinions about the abilities and needs of workers' children. In addition, the lives of migrant families and those of the residents of the communities that employ migrant labor are largely separate (Connor, Rainer, Simcox, & Thomisee, 2007), a factor that could promote negative and inaccurate intergroup perception. As a consequence, migrant workers' school age children may be more susceptible to self-fulfilling processes to the degree that they are more likely to encounter inaccurate and negative expectations about their academic potential, have less opportunity to correct others' perceptions over time, and must repeatedly confront this situation as they move to each new community. In parallel fashion, the disinclination of undocumented immigrants to make use of community resources for fear of being detected (Breeding, Harley, Rogers, & Crystal, 2005) may extend to interactions with school personnel, which could function not only to foster inaccurate beliefs about parental commitments to their children's education, but also to prevent those beliefs from being corrected.

In addition, stigma conscious should be more likely when one confronts a stronger and more negative stereotype. The anti-immigration sentiment focused on Latino/a immigrants is comparatively high, with discussions in the media and by political figures contending that illegal immigrants do not contribute to U.S. society, siphon off scarce resources, and threaten jobs for U.S. citizens (Immigration Policy Center, 2008; Lee & Ottati, 2002). The highly visible nature of the debate, the marginalization of illegal immigrants in American society, and the increasing degree to which their presence is treated as a serious criminal offense virtually ensures that they and their families will be acutely aware of the negative stereotype held about their group, and therefore more vulnerable to stigma consciousness and its effects (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007).

It is also possible that new immigrants are more susceptible to stereotype threat because of their attitudes toward educational achievement. New immigrants and their children tend to have higher educational aspirations, value education more, and more strongly believe that education will provide a means of improving their quality of life (Feliciano, 2001; Hill & Torres, this issue). Later generations, more acculturated Latinos, and those who have assimilated into an underclass group, may have undergone a degree of disidentification with academics (Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Recall that stereotype threat is not produced just by the awareness that one might confirm a group stereotype, but also requires that the individual values proficiency in that domain. Thus, academic contexts could potentially create greater threat for new immigrants and their children who more closely identify with academic achievement, a hypothesis that has been supported among nonimmigrant students of color (Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Connections with Education Policy

Although self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat effects are conceptualized as occurring on the individual level, their effects could be moderated by the broader context of education policies. To illustrate how this might occur, we speculate on the implications of both tracking and the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, as well as the potentially positive impact of bilingual education for LEP students.

Support for tracking is based on the premise that student learning is maximized when students are prepared to learn the new material that they will next be taught. Students who demonstrate lower achievement are placed in lower tracks because they are believed to be less well prepared. Regardless of the practical effectiveness of tracking, Latino/a students face negative stereotypes about their intelligence and academic capabilities, which could lead them to be unjustifiably tracked into less challenging classes, thereby reducing their educational opportunities and completing a self-fulfilling prophecy. In a sense, tracking could provide an institutionalized mechanism to mediate the effects of negatively biased expectations.

On the national level, the federal NCLB legislation, first enacted in 2001, requires schools to make annual progress toward achieving 100% proficiency in math and reading by 2014, with repeated failure to do so being met with increasingly severe consequences. To avoid these consequences schools must show improvement for the school not only as a whole, but also for specific subgroups, including minorities and English language learners. The expectation that these groups will perform poorly combined with the importance of their scores could cause Latino/a and LEP students to be viewed as liabilities, resulting in stereotype activation, increased stereotype threat effects, greater ethnic salience and stigma consciousness. Moreover, the motivation to boost annual progress toward proficiency goals could promote harmful self-fulfilling effects. If Latino/a and LEP students are thought unlikely to achieve proficiency by the next assessment, resources could be diverted to others perceived to be on the verge of proficiency (Hamilton, Stecher, Vernez, & Zimmer, 2007). Thus, NCLB legislation may exacerbate the adverse conditions already faced by students in poor, urban, and high minority schools and initiate the harmful processes discussed throughout this article.

We have thus far highlighted the negative effects of self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat on Latino/as' academic performance—a concentration that is appropriate given the link between these processes and social problems. However, it is also useful to consider how students might be protected from these effects. Consider the case of bilingual instruction. Evidence indicates that bilingual students benefit with regard to literacy achievement, cognitive flexibility, psychological well-being, social relationships, and educational aspirations, suggesting that bilingual instruction is a wise investment

because it enables students to draw on resources in multiple cultures (Proctor, August, Carlo, & Barr, this issue). Bilingual education also conveys to students, families, school personnel, and the larger community that Latino/a culture and language are of value. By providing an educational context in which LEP Latino/a students can readily maximize their achievement, bilingual education may reduce prejudice, stigmatization, stereotyping, and negative expectations, thereby forestalling the harmful processes that they might otherwise initiate. Conversely, one would anticipate policies mandating English-only instruction to have the reverse effect.

Conclusion

We have discussed how variables associated with Latino/a ethnicity and culture could be linked to educational outcomes through self-fulfilling prophecy, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat processes. A major goal of this article was to consider processes that could detail mechanisms connecting acculturation and ethnic identity to academic achievement among Latino/as. Applications of these theoretical perspectives to this area of research offer unique frameworks for evaluating and organizing empirical findings, enhancing communication, and extending findings to the broader psychological field by virtue of their relevance to more general psychological processes and theory. The use of such theoretical frameworks helps specify causal priority and relationships among variables, thereby suggesting new directions for future work focusing on the identification of mediational processes.

The identification of mediational mechanisms will also reveal processes and variables that can be targeted for intervention. In recognition of the exigency of assisting Latino/as currently in the educational system, new interventions could focus on training Latino/a students and families to identify and thwart these processes, thereby empowering them to protect their own interests. It is equally important to educate teachers, administrators, and other school personnel about ways to avoid creating or otherwise contributing to these harmful effects. Finally, although interventions targeted to proximal factors might be successful in moderating these effects on an individual basis, it is also necessary to address the problems of stereotyping, prejudice, stigmatization and discrimination at their various sources, which would seemingly include policy makers, opinion leaders and, fundamentally, the populace.

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