

Latino Youth's Beliefs and Attitudes and their Influence on After-School Activity Participation

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Abstract

Involvement in after-school activities increases the probability that youth with higher social-level risks will acquire academic achievements. Unfortunately, a high percentage of Latino youths are likely to face risks such as attending low-quality/segregated schools and residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods. These various factors, among others, are highly associated with poor academic achievement and low educational attainment. It's been proposed that in order to enhance vulnerable youth's educational resilience, they must be exposed to a distribution of extracurricular activities. In this study, we examine Latino youths' attributes (individual, family-related, and structural) and how they're related to after-school activity participation. All three factors are found to be significantly correlated with the amount of after-school activity in our Latino sample.

Keywords: Hispanic/Latino, after-school activities, youth resilience

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The Latino population is the country's largest ethnic minority group. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), Latinos represent 15.3% of the current population, projecting that by the year 2015, Latino youths, those between the ages of 10 and 20 years, will comprise 16.7% percent of the Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Eamon and Mulder (2005) indicate that Latino youths fare worse on several indicators of well-being such as academic achievement and educational attainment. Additionally, social science research has provided a tremendous amount of information about individuals' attributes (i.e., behaviors/attitudes), family-related attributes (i.e., family structure/social capital), and structural attributes (i.e., school practices) that are associated with Latinos' educational failures (Vélez & Saenz, 2001). But, there has been minimal research regarding the factors that influence Latino students to thrive and succeed (Rodriguez, Morrobel, & Villarruel, 2003). In this study, we will examine Latino youths' attributes (individual, family-related, and structural factors) and how they're related to their participation in after-school activities.

The Importance of After-School Activities

Researchers within the realms of sociology, psychology, and education have thoroughly investigated the positive effects that participation in extracurricular activities has on youth development (Peck, Roeser, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2008; Shannon, 2006). The experiences, demands, and choices provided by extracurricular activities contribute to youths' socialization opportunities, psychological growth, and the development of competencies and dispositions (Newman, Bidjerano, Ozdogru, Kao, Ozkose-Biyik, & Johnson, 2007). More importantly,

extracurricular activity involvement, both within and outside of the school context, plays a significant role in the strengthening of youths' educational resilience.

Involvement in extracurricular and after-school activities increases the probability that vulnerable youth with higher social-level risks (i.e., living in poverty) will acquire academic achievements, such as graduating high school and attending college (Peck et al., 2008). Unfortunately, a high percentage of Latino youths live in higher poverty rates than non-Hispanic Whites and African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). They are also more likely to face other kinds of developmental risks such as being born to teenage mothers, attending low-quality/segregated schools, and residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Eamon & Mulder, 2005). These various factors are highly associated with poor academic achievement, low educational attainment, and the detrimental decision of many Latino youths to leave school indefinitely (Vélez & Saenz, 2001). The need to increase Latino youths' educational resilience is considered necessary at this point. Peck et al. (2008) proposed that, in order to enhance vulnerable youths' educational resilience, they must be exposed to a broad distribution of extracurricular activities that are developmentally appropriate.

Understanding After-School Involvement among Latino Youth

The approach used to explore the factors relating to Latino youths' willingness to participate in after-school activities follows Okagaki's (2001) Triarchic Model, a model consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. The Triarchic Model (Okagaki, 2001) focuses on the roles of the child (Individual Factors), the family (Family-Related Factors), and the school (Structural-Level Factors), in order to understand the variation in minority students' school achievement. Following the same model, the roles of these three facets will be explored

to understand Latino youths' school involvement, since it is highly correlated to positive youth development outcomes.

Individual Factors

Expectations and beliefs.

Okagaki (2001) summarizes that research on “Latino adolescents indicate that those who are doing well in school believe that education serves an important function” (p. 12). Moreover, Latino adolescents who believe that school is beneficial have stronger motivations for academic achievement (Okagaki, 2001). Thus, Latino students who have positive school goals and value school highly, perform better academically because they believe that education serves a purpose in their lives. Similarly, Vélez and Saenz (2001) cite that “student orientations toward the future ... expectations for college are ... related to school persistence” (p. 449). Moreover, students with positive college goals perform academically better.

Family-Related Factors

Peers, parents, and family.

Parent involvement has been shown to be beneficial in improving academic effort, grades, and attendance (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). There has been a great deal of research relating to the influence that parents have on the choices that adolescents make regarding extracurricular activities (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; Newman et al., 2007; Shannon, 2006). It has been documented that parents influence both the activities that children participate in and the activities that they do not participate in (Shannon, 2006). Furthermore, parents not only communicate their values and beliefs about leisure activities, but model behaviors that shape their children's leisure activity choices, values, and attitudes (Shannon, 2006). Dunn, Kinney, and Hofferth (2003) found that high parental involvement is associated

with parents' beliefs that after-school activities are opportunities for learning and developing moral, personal, and social skills. Moreover, it has also been found that there are parental-cultural academic expectation differences and that these differences influence the types of activities that parents allow their children to take part in (Newman et al., 2007). It has also been noted that the cultural beliefs and norms of the family play a critical role in children's motivation for school achievement (Okagaki, 2001). For example, Newman et al. (2007) found that young Taiwanese adolescents participated in extracurricular activities chosen by their elders that promoted formal skills development, while young American adolescents participated in more self-chosen extracurricular activities approved by their parents that promoted both academic and social skills. These cultural differences are prevalent among Latino families too. *Familismo*, defined as "a strong identification with an attachment to nuclear and extended families, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among [family] members" (Marin, 1993, p. 152), is a strong feature of Latino culture. Jarama Alvan, Belgrave, and Zea (1996) found that, for Latino adolescents, emotional support from family and friends were a critical factor for school success. Friends' academic values, as well as the families', have been found to influence school engagement and achievement as well as extracurricular activity choices and behaviors (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Shannon, 2006).

Structural-Level Factors

Educational and community environments are found to be as influential to school achievement as the individual and familial ecosystems mentioned above. Research has found that positive school climates and positive school attachments are associated with higher engagement and motivation to learn (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007). Additionally, school environments provide social support that is helpful with academic adjustment, as well as

with the promotion of pro-social behavior (Jarama Alvan et al., 1996; Eamon & Mulder, 2005). Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, and Gally (2007) highlight the correlation between adolescents' positive ties within the school systems and communities and their health and well-being (i.e., depression; anti-social behavior).

Within ethnic minority research, perceptions of non-inclusive school environments have been found to be negatively correlated with school engagement and school achievement (Flanagan et al., 2007). Vélez and Saenz (2001) adequately state that adolescents' behaviors, attitudes, and school performance are products of the student-teacher relationships and of the neighborhoods that they are a part of. It is no surprise then that adolescents who feel that they are not accepted because of their ethnic group memberships are not doing well in school or in the community. For instance, school personnel have been found to hold cultural stereotypes that have directly hindered Latino youth academic success (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Gonzales, Knight, Birman, & Sirolli, 2004). Bouchey and Harter (2005) reported that "both teachers and classmates underrate the competence of Latino students" (p. 683). Therefore, researchers have started advocating policies and interventions that will improve the quality of school environments (i.e., positive and supportive student-teacher relationships) for ethnic minorities.

Current Study

Drawing on the Triarchic Model put forth by Okagaki (2001), the current study examines the relationships and associations between Latino youths' values and attitudes and their influence on the youths' participation in after-school activities. By looking at all three factors, we hypothesize that after-school activities are more prevalent in Latino youths that: a) have positive future school aspirations and college plans; b) have parents that want them to participate and peers that encourage them to participate; and c) have positive school feelings and strong

community attachments. Our predictions are based on past research literature that have paved the way to our current study.

Method

Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)

The current study entails a secondary analysis of the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey database. The MSS is administered every three years, most recently in 2010. During each administration year, all operating public school districts are invited to participate. In 2007, a total of 136,549 students participated from grades 6, 9, and 12. Some items were deemed inappropriate for students in the 6th grade and were not asked on the 6th grade form. Results from the MSS are provided by public school students in Minnesota via local public school districts and managed by the MSS Interagency Team, including the MN Departments of Education, Health, Human Services, Public Safety, and Corrections.

Pearson Correlations

The primary analyses for this paper include a series of correlations and partial correlations conducted with SPSS (Version 17.0; SPSS, 2009). We present differences in scale descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) by grade and gender. Additional analyses were completed in order to investigate the variation in the correlations among each scale and activity (primary concern) based on grade and gender.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

For the creation of the community support and school climate scales, the following methodology was followed. The scales were defined and items matching the definition of each scale were identified. The direction of the items was checked so that each was connotatively consistent. The factor structures, based on factors expected from theory and prior research, were

assessed through CFA. To complete the CFA for each measure, MPLUS 5.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) was used. MPLUS is useful for CFA analysis because it allows for dichotomous and ordinal factor indicators (items), and utilizes a robust weighted least squares estimator (WLSMV) that accommodates missing data by employing probit regression for factor estimation. Once the scales were refined, total scores were computed by averaging the rating values from each item.

Results

Out of this sample group, a total of 7,416 participants (48.8% Males) described themselves as Mexican American/Chicano/Chicana and/or Puerto Rican/Other Latin American: 5,598 described themselves as Mexican American or Chicano/Chicana; 2,215 as Puerto Rican or other Latin American; and 397 as both.

Omissions of Data

The data from the 397 participants that described themselves as both Mexican American/Chicano/Chicana and Puerto Rican/Other Latin American were not analyzed.

After-School Activities and Individual Factors

Both individual factors and the amount of after-school activity participation were submitted to a Pearson correlation. As reported in Table 1, both individual factors were significantly correlated with the amount of after-school activity that Latino adolescents partook in. Specifically, Latino students who had future school plans, such as graduating high school and thinking about attending some kind of trade school, vocational school, or college, were more likely to be involved in after-school activities (School plans, $r = .23, p < .01$; College plans, $r = .28, p < .01$). Additionally, about 21% of Latino students responded that they participated in after-school activities because it would help them to get into college.

Table 1 about here

After-School Activities and Familial Factors

Both family and peer factors and after-school activity participation were also submitted to a Pearson correlation. As noted in Table 1, both familial factors were found to be significantly correlated with after-school participation. Parents had an influence in how much after-school participation Latino kids were involved in; parental factor was significantly correlated with after-school participation ($r = .17, p < .01$). Peer influence was significantly correlated also, however, the correlation was higher than the parental factor ($r = .23, p < .01$). Throughout all three grades, peer influence was found to be more influential than parental influence (6th grade, 23% vs. 13%; 9th grade, 24% vs. 13%; 12th grade, 21% vs. 8%; respectively).

After-School activities and Structural-Level Factors

As noted above, correlations between both Structural-Level scales were tested. The correlation between the school climate scale and the community support scale was found to be highly significant, $r = .41, p < .01$. The high correlation attests that both of these measures are highly similar in addressing Structural-Level Factors. Both of these scales were also significantly correlated with the amount of participation in after-school activities that Latino youths partook in, as noted in Table 1 (School Climate, $r = .12, p < .01$; Community Support, $r = .24, p < .01$). Only one correlation between the school climate scale and the amount of after-school activity was not significant. This non-significant correlation was found in the male group from the twelfth grade. However, this correlation did not change the overall correlation between school climate and after-school activity when all the Latino youth data were tested.

Discussion

All three factors were significantly correlated with the amount of after-school activity of Latino youth. In summary, Latino youth with positive future scholastic aspirations participated in more after-school activities. Along with previous data and results, we can confidently say that those Latino students that have positive school plans and have auspicious college aspirations are also engaged in higher amounts of after-school activities. Secondly, this is also true for Latino students who have parental figures that want them to participate, as well as those who have peers that are participating in after-school activities. Lastly, those Latino students that have a positive school climate and feel a strong sense of community support are also engaged in higher amounts of after-school activities.

The question that arises now is how to implement these results into useful policy and curriculum change. For future work, we recommend that focus groups be formed and an extensive teaching program be developed with an emphasis on the three factors delineated above. The focus of these groups should be on the interaction of these factors and the effects that they have on the level of participation in after-school activities. It would also serve useful to educate the members of these focus groups on the manifold positive impacts that after-school activities have on those that partake in them. It is to our hope that such focus groups would increase both the amount of after-school activity participation and, especially, the educational resilience that is needed in the young Latino community.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among Individual, Familial, and Structure-Level Factors and After-School Activity (ASA) Participation

Variable	Sixth Grade				Ninth Grade				Twelve Grade			
	Males		Females		Males		Females		Males		Females	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
ASA Participation	7.33	6.72	7.59	6.43	6.72	6.48	7.77	6.94	7.06	7.26	7.12	6.68
Individual Factors												
School Plans	-	-	-	-	3.68	1.12	3.94	1.02	3.75	1.03	4.09	0.86
College Plans	0.18	0.38	0.19	0.39	0.22	0.42	0.28	0.45	0.17	0.38	0.22	0.42
School Plans x ASA	-	-	-	-	.23**		.24**		.21**		.21**	
College Plans x ASA	.18**		.23**		.31**		.39**		.21**		.32**	
Familial Factors												
Parents	0.13	0.34	0.14	0.35	0.11	0.31	0.16	0.37	0.08	0.28	0.08	0.26
Peers	0.21	0.40	0.27	0.45	0.20	0.40	0.29	0.45	0.22	0.41	0.22	0.42
Parents x ASA	.10**		.15**		.20**		.22**		.20**		.15**	
Peers x ASA	.17**		.22**		.25**		.28**		.17**		.22**	
Structure-Level Factors												
School Climate	42.31	8.25	43.05	7.61	39.81	8.79	40.35	7.09	41.23	8.61	41.16	6.72
Comm. Support	13.37	4.03	14.54	3.92	12.11	3.87	12.66	3.88	11.93	3.77	12.49	3.69
School Climate x ASA	.11**		.13**		.08**		.16**		0.02		.19**	
Comm. Support x ASA	.22**		.20**		.21**		.26**		.26**		.39**	

Note: School plans were not included in the 6th grade version of the Minnesota Student Survey.

**Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).