Opportunity Beliefs and Behavioral Outcomes in Latinx Youth: A Test of Ogbu’s Cultural-Ecological Model

Prospectus

**Background**

Ogbu’s cultural-ecological model attempts to explain differences in educational outcomes for various ethnic groups in the U.S., with a particular emphasis on *involuntary* and *voluntary minorities* (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Ogbu argues that involuntary minorities (e.g., African Americans, Native Americans) are members of marginalized groups unwillingly incorporated into American society through enslavement, conquest, or colonization, and thus interpret their presence in the U.S. as forced. Because they contrast their less advantaged circumstances with those of the dominant group (e.g., Europeans Americans in the U.S.), they have a *negative* dual frame of reference, and often interpret social barriers as permanent. As a consequence, involuntary minorities and their children tend to adopt coping and survival patterns that reflect less “effort optimism” toward school, higher school disengagement, and “oppositional cultures” that counter mainstream societal norms (Obgu, 2002; Obgu & Simmons, 1998).

In contrast, voluntary minorities (e.g., Caribbean Americans; Chinese Americans) are those from other societies who have settled in the U.S. because they want to improve their economic, political, or social status, and thus do not interpret their presence in the U.S. as forced (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Because they contrast their current circumstances with opportunities available in their place of origin, Ogbu argues that voluntary minorities have a *positive* dual frame of reference, and often believe that social barriers are temporary ones that will mostly dissipate if they excel academically and learn the dominant language. As a consequence, voluntary minorities and their children tend to adopt greater effort optimism toward educational achievement and mainstream pursuits.

Although Ogbu’s model has been applied to African Americans and Asian Americans in the U.S. (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Lee, 1991; Lee, 1994; Mikelson, 1990; Ogbu & Simmons, 1994; Solomon, 1992; Weiwen, 1993), little is known about its application to Latinos, who currently make up the largest (18.5%) ethnic minority group in the US (US Census, 2020). The diverse cultural histories of U.S. Latinos make it difficult to identify which label best captures their collective experience. On the one hand, because a large percentage (70%) of US Latinos are either foreign-born or have a foreign-born parent (Current Population Survey, 2019**)**, some argue that they are best thought of as voluntary minorities in the US context (Rangel, 2016). On the other hand, many Latinos define their relationship with the US through the lens of conquest or colonialism (e.g., Mexican-Americans in the southwestern US or Puerto Ricans in the eastern US), suggesting that involuntary minority might serve as a better descriptor (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Yet a third possibility is that neither label applies; a large percentage of Latino families include migrant workers, violence refugees, and undocumented residents (American Community Survey, 2019), and these social categories do not fit neatly within Ogbu’s voluntary/involuntary minority framework (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Thus, given their complicated history of immigration and incorporation into the U.S., there is a need to better explain existing differences in behavioral outcome among Latinos in relation to Ogbu’s theory.

Using data from a cross-sectional study of cultural beliefs and behavioral outcomes among urban, high school students, I plan to test the application of Ogbu’s cultural-ecological model to Latinx youth. This study addresses two primary questions:

**Research Questions**

***Research Question 1: Does factor analysis support Ogbu’s 5-factor model of opportunity beliefs?*** I hypothesize a confirmatory factor analysis, using a sample of high school students, will result in a five-factor model comprising the following dimensions: perception of social barriers, dual frame of reference, effort optimism, academic engagement, and oppositional culture.

***Research Question 2: Are there demographic differences in opportunity beliefs?*** I expect that opportunity beliefs will differ based on generational status (1st vs. 2nd generation). For example, consistent with Ogbu’s theory, I predict that 1st generation Latinx students (i.e., those born outside the U.S.) will report more positive features that reflect voluntary minority status compared to 2nd generation students (i.e., those born in the U.S. to immigrant parents).

**Data Description**

The proposed study includes data collected from 375 students enrolled in a Los Angeles high school who self-identified as Latinx (46% Mexican heritage, 31% Salvadoran heritage, 16% another Latino ethnicity, 2% Honduran and 5% attributed to missing data. Participant ages range from 13-18 years old (*M* = 15.25), and youth completed surveys assessing beliefs and values, psychological adjustment, and behavioral outcomes. This study will focus on a subset of questions assessing opportunity beliefs.

Beliefs about the opportunity structure were based on the 42 item Opportunity Beliefs Survey (OBS; Huey, 2005). OBS items were designed to assess core aspects of Ogbu’s social-ecological theory, including *social barriers perception* (e.g., “if people speak proper English, they can be very successful in this country,” “discrimination will always keep minorities down”), *dual frame of reference* (e.g., “my family is better off in the U.S. than anywhere else,” “if I lived in another country, I’d be better off”), and *effort optimism* (e.g., “the best thing is to ignore discrimination and do what you have to do to succeed,” “hard work is the key to success in life”). Gang involvement was based on items from the Eurogang Survey (Maxson et al., 1998), and delinquent behavior was based on items from the Self-Report Delinquency Scale (SRDS; Elliott et al., 1983).

Overall, this proposed study tries to assess the validity of core aspects of Ogbu’s cultural-ecological model in relation to 1st and 2nd generation Latinx adolescents. Specifically, I will assess whether factor analysis supports Ogbu’s dimensions of opportunity beliefs among Latinx youth, and whether opportunity beliefs correlate with demographic characteristics and behavioral outcomes in the ways expected by the model. Findings from this study might be useful in helping identify target points for psychosocial interventions with Latinx youth.

**Data Plan**

The focus of my analyses is to fit a 5-factor model (CFA) and assess the relationship of generation status to opportunity beliefs. Once I confirm the model, I will use SPSS and R to complete the multilevel modeling portion. Multi-level mixed effect linear regression will be performed to appropriately accommodate the nested nature of my data. Hence, the models have a two-level structure where level-one individuals (with gen status as the predictor) are nested within level two (ethnicity).

**Preliminary Outcomes:**

Results support the presence of four factors underlying the Opportunity Beliefs Scale: positive dual frame of reference, effort optimism, academic achievement, and conventional values. Furthermore, generational status predicted more positive features reflecting voluntary minority status (OBS score).

Diagram

Description automatically generated

GitHub Repository: <https://github.com/brodellusc/MLM-Prospectus---Opportunity-Beliefs-among-Latino-Youth>

The data analytic scripts and supplemental materials for this project will be available at:

<https://github.com/brodellusc/MLM-Prospectus---Opportunity-Beliefs-among-Latino-Youth.git>