

# Hispanic Career Success: The Role of Acculturation

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Submission #14235 accepted for the 2014 Academy of Management Annual Meeting

### **Hispanic Career Success: The Role of Acculturation**

Hispanics are currently the largest ethnic group in the United States with over 52 million people and approximately 17% of the population. To date, Hispanics are disproportionately underrepresented among professional and leadership ranks. Surprisingly, there is still a lack of research done on employment issues for this important group. Given the scarcity of research and theory focusing on the careers of Hispanic professionals in the United States, as well as acknowledging the importance of applying more focused attention to how cultural variables, including acculturation constructs, are related to the career development of Hispanics, we advance a theoretical framework of career success for Hispanics. In particular, we examine how cultural factors associated with the Hispanic acculturation experience may uniquely affect Hispanics in their professional roles. We provide testable propositions for scholars who are interested in this ethnic group. As well, armed with this insight, it is our hope that organizational leaders and decision-makers can better support Hispanics in achieving more successful and satisfying careers.

Keywords: Hispanics, acculturation, careers

Hispanics<sup>1</sup> are currently the largest and also one of the fastest-growing ethnic or racial minority groups in the nation. At 52 million people, this important demographic constitutes approximately 17% of the United States population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012) and 15.4% of this country's workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Notwithstanding their considerable presence and growth, there has not been a corresponding increase in the proportion of Hispanics within professional or leadership roles (Blancero, DelCampo, & Marron, 2007; Cruz, 2011; Kochhar, 2005; Mundra, Moellmer, & Lopez-Aqueres, 2003). This is reflected in the fact that Hispanics make up just 8.4% of those working in management and professional occupations, and less than 5% of all chief executives (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

The underrepresentation of Hispanics business professionals and leaders in organizations across the United States is especially problematic and calls for a closer examination of factors that may inhibit or facilitate their professional opportunities and career development. Given the importance of cultural variables in the career development of Hispanics (Arbona, 1995; Flores, Navarro & Ojeda, 2006; Marin & Gamba, 2003 Marin & Marin, 1991), this suggests the need for focused attention on how factors related to Hispanics' unique cultural identity may impact their professional opportunities and different aspects of their career success.

Hispanics as a population are a heterogeneous group, comprised of individuals from a variety of countries, races, as well as historical and sociopolitical backgrounds. There is also a broad range of educational, socioeconomic, and professional representations of Hispanics in the United States (Ruiz, 2006). Despite their differences, Hispanics often share features related to

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<sup>1</sup>The terms "Hispanic," "Hispanic American," and "Latina/o" are often used interchangeably. We primarily use the term "Hispanics" to refer specifically to individuals living in the United States who self-identify as being of Latin American and/or Spanish, descent. Latin America includes, but is not limited to Central America, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and South America.

their cultural identity, including connections to the Spanish language, as well as similar cultural values (Quintana & Scull, 2009). In many Hispanic contexts, such group-specific cultural values include those related to collectivism, which stress the importance of cohesion within social groups and priority of group goals over individual goals (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

One key facet of Hispanics' cultural identity is related to their experiences with the acculturation process (Arbona, 1995; Gong, Takeuchi, Agbayani-Siewert, & Tacata, 2003). Acculturation occurs when Hispanic individuals migrate into the new culture of the United States and integrate the values, beliefs, and practices of the new society, while also maintaining the values, beliefs, and practices of their original Hispanic culture (Hernandez, Cohen, & Garcia, 2011; Siatkowski, 2007).

Acculturation is one of the most critical processes associated with successful psychosocial adaption for many ethnic minorities, especially those from immigrant backgrounds (Zane & Mak, 2003). For Hispanics in particular, Arbona (1995) theorized that acculturation may be an important factor in their career development and career-related processes and outcomes. Subsequently there has been some empirical evidence linking Anglo-oriented acculturation to Hispanics' educational and career development (Flores, Ojeda et al., 2006; Flores, Berkel et al., 2006; Valdivia & Flores, 2012). Furthermore, acculturation has been associated with various career-related factors including career and academic choice, self-efficacy, interests, aspirations and job satisfaction, performance, as well as and work values and attitudes; albeit, with mixed findings (Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009).

While the research previously done in this realm of inquiry sets the groundwork for a potential connection between acculturation-related influences and certain career consequences, much of the association is speculative in nature and stops short of connecting outcomes

associated with the acculturation experience to different dimensions of career success for Hispanics in particular. Additionally, given the scarcity of research and theory focusing on the careers of Hispanic professionals in the United States (Blancero et al., 2007; Cruz, 2011), as well as acknowledging the importance of applying more focused attention to how cultural variables, including acculturation constructs, are related to the career development of Hispanics (Arbona, 1995; Flores, Navarro et al., 2006; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Marin & Marin, 1991; Marin & Gamba, 2003), we advance a theoretical framework of career success for Hispanics in the United States that examines how cultural factors associated with the Hispanic acculturation experience may uniquely affect Hispanics in their professional roles (see Figure 1). Armed with this insight, it is our hope that organizational leaders and decision-makers can better support Hispanics in achieving more successful and satisfying careers.

### **Hispanic American's Career Success**

Career success is a socially constructed reality. Therefore, how do we determine what constitutes a successful career for Hispanics in the United States? On the one hand, Hispanics are disproportionately underrepresented amongst the top professional and leadership ranks across Corporate America. For example, a mere 3% of Fortune 500 corporate board seats are filled by Hispanics (HACR, 2013) and of the nearly 22 million Hispanic workers in this country, only 20.6% work in management or professional occupations, as compared to 38% in the general population (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). This disparity may reflect pervasive obstacles to their career success, especially in light of the fact that Hispanics represent 17% of the U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012) with a purchasing power of nearly \$1.5 billion (Nielsen, 2012). Notwithstanding this grim reality, we recognize the distinctive role that cultural values play in their career-related values and perceptions and may serve as a frame of reference

for how career success is defined (DelCampo, Rogers, & Hinrichs, 2010; Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz, 1995). As such, we consider different conceptualizations of career success for Hispanic professionals in the United States.

### **Conceptualizing Career Success**

Traditional career success has been defined as the “positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one’s work experience” (Judge, et al., 1995, p. 486). Turner’s (1960) two systems of upward mobility, namely, contest-mobility and sponsored-mobility, provide a useful framework for examining the construct of career success in organizations and for Hispanics in particular. The contest-mobility perspective is a merit-based system whereby advancement is much like a contest where workers compete for and win the “prize” due to their own skills, abilities, motivation, and effort. Corresponding with tenets of tournament theory (Gomez-Mejia, Trevino, & Mixon, 2009; Kordana, 1995; O’Neill & O’Reilly, 2010), the contest-mobility perspective suggests that advancement is predicated on the ideology of equitable meritocracy such that those who are the most qualified and deserving will experience the prize of upward mobility. However, underlying this assumption is the belief that the contest is fair and accessible to anyone interested in devoting the required time and energy.

While the contest-mobility perspective emphasizes individual effort and merit, in contrast, Turner’s (1960) sponsored-mobility perspective adds that advancement is also in the hands of organizational elites. That is, candidates are selected and special status is granted based on some desirable qualities or criterion of supposed merit. To help sponsored candidates win the competition, organizational elites provide candidates favorable treatment and sponsoring activities to positively distinguish them from their peer group.

### **Objective and Subjective Career Success**

The construct of career success is viewed as having both objective and subjective dimensions (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Heslin, 2005; Judge et al., 1995; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005; Poole & Langan-Fox, 1993). Objective career success consists of concrete, specific, measurable and easily observable career accomplishments attained during the course of one's career (Bailout, 2007; Heslin, 2005; Poole & Langan-Fox, 1993). While the construct of objective career success has been conceptualized in many ways, the most often used indicators are related to income, promotion rate, and positional level in the organizational hierarchy (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

While objective career success is associated with observable career accomplishments, subjective career success consists of affective aspirations involving an individual's sense of pride and satisfaction with his/her career (Hall, 1976; Heslin, 2005; Ng et al., 2005; Park, 2010). Subjective career success has also been broadly defined in the literature; however, it is most often associated with one's own perception of career success, organizational commitment, as well as one's job or career satisfaction (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Hall, 1976; Heslin, 2005; Judge et al., 1995; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002; Ng et al., 2005).

Many have found a positive relationship between objective and subjective career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Judge et al., 1995; Ng & Feldman, 2010); however, as argued by Hall and Chandler (2005), career success is not an "either or" situation such that "objectively 'successful' outcomes do not always lead to psychological success" (p. 3). There is also some evidence that this may also be the case for many Hispanics, who, notwithstanding barriers to traditional definitions of career success, are often satisfied with their careers (Cruz & Molina, 2010; Cruz, Molina, & Rivera, 2010; Garcia-Lopez & Segura, 2008; Garcia-Lopez, 2008). We posit that

Hispanics' cultural influences may contribute to different perceptions of their own career success, which may in fact, be different than those traditionally valued by the individualistic business culture of the United States.

### **Predictors of Career Success**

Research on career success is particularly interested in its predictors (Judge et al., 1995; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Ng et al., 2005; Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999). In a meta-analysis of predictors of career success, Ng and his colleagues (2005) employed Turner's (1960) theoretical framework of upward mobility to classify predictors of career success including variables related to human capital, organizational sponsorship, and socio-demographic status.

### **Human Capital**

Human capital refers to an individual's educational, personal, and professional skills and experiences (Becker, 1993) and is a consistent predictor of career success (Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005; Wayne et al., 1999), especially objective indicators (Ng et al., 2005; Ng & Feldman, 2010). As such, it is assumed that those who increase their human capital investments through increased education, work-related skills, and experience on the job and their careers are viewed as being more qualified and productive; therefore, they are more likely to be promoted to higher positional levels and earn higher incomes.

### **Organizational Sponsorship**

Consistent with the sponsored-mobility systems, organizational sponsorship variables are also related to both dimensions of career success. Organizational sponsorship predictors are those resources and activities provided to employees that facilitate their career success, which can include mentoring, developmental relationships and networks, career sponsorship, supervisor support, training and development opportunities, and organizational resources (Ng. et al, 2005).

For Hispanics in particular, the presence of mentoring relationships and developmental networks is found to be a key component to their advancement into management and professional roles (Blancero & DelCampo, 2005; Mundra et al., 2003).

### **Socio-Demographic Moderators**

While organizational sponsorship predictors illustrate how organizations support employees in their career development (e.g., having access to more developmental networks, providing mentoring opportunities), socio-demographic variables are often used as the criteria to allocate this sponsorship. Socio-demographic predictors are those related to an individual's demographic and social background.

While previous research has considered minority status (Judge et al., 1995) and race (Ng et al., 2005) as a potential socio-demographic moderators of career success, variables related to ethnicity or cultural identity, including acculturation constructs, have been largely overlooked in the vocational literature. Remarkably, there has been no known empirical evidence that has examined how these and other cultural variables affect an acculturating individual's career success, especially for Hispanic business professionals in the United States.

### **The Hispanic Acculturation Experience**

The Hispanic acculturation process is different from that of other acculturating groups due in part to their unique cultural values that emphasize close social and family ties, as well as other racioethnic characteristics related to language use and experience with discrimination (Smart & Smart, 1995). The acculturation process tends to affect more recent Hispanic immigrants and those who are foreign-born; however, acculturation and its related outcomes often continue to impact Hispanics who are native-born and also of later generations (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Padilla, 1985; Phinney & Flores, 2002), which may be due, in part,

to acculturative stressors and discrimination that remain salient beyond the first generation (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2009).

### **Conceptualizing Hispanic Acculturation**

Many conceptualizations of the acculturation process are present in the literature; although, the classic definition of acculturation was proposed by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) as a “phenomena which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). However, the process of acculturation is often differentiated from that of enculturation in research with Hispanics (Castillo et al., 2010; Quintana & Scull, 2009). More specifically, acculturation is the adoption of and adaption to new cultural patterns that occur when different cultural, ethnic, or racial groups come into contact with each other; whereas, enculturation is more centered on the maintenance of one’s own cultural heritage or traditions as a result of this cross-cultural contact or independent of it (Quintana & Scull, 2009). Stronger identification with the Anglo culture is often a result of acculturation processes that occur through schooling and interactions with the dominant group, whereas identification with the Hispanic culture is maintained through enculturation processes promoted by parents and the larger Hispanic community (Quintana & Scull, 2009).

However, understanding and measuring acculturation with Hispanics is a difficult and complex undertaking because it lacks clarity and is not well understood (Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales, & Bautista, 2012). Moreover, there has been considerable variance in how the construct of acculturation has been measured and operationalized in the literature in the past few decades (Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009). This lack of methodological uniformity has resulted in mixed findings and has disallowed comparisons.

A documented criticism of many researchers (Lara et al., 2012; Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009; Organista & Kurasaki, 2003; Yoon, Hacker, Hewitt, Abrams, & Cleary, 2012) is that the inconsistent findings across studies of acculturation can be attributed to the high degree of variance in how acculturation has been measured and operationalized in the literature, such as the frequent use of unidimensional measures<sup>2</sup> as proxies for this complex process.

Unidimensional models are based on the assumption that changes in cultural identity take place along a single continuum whereby as acculturating individuals adopt the attitudes, behaviors, and values of the new society, they necessarily must relinquish those of their culture of origin, including aspects of their ethnic identity (Cuellar & Roberts, 1997; Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000). Ethnic identity is considered to be a subcomponent of the acculturation process and is defined as the magnitude to which an individual appreciates and actively engages in his or her own cultural values, traditions, beliefs, and behaviors (Phinney, 2003).

Recognizing its complexity, researcher are moving away from this “assimilation model” of acculturation recognizing that it is not a linear process of abandoning aspects of one’s culture or origin as one becomes part of the new society (Hernandez et al., 2011; Phinney & Flores, 2002) and have begun advocating for more multidimensional conceptualizations and measures of acculturation that incorporate both behavioral (language spoken and affiliation) and cognitive (values and beliefs) indicators (Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009; Sam & Berry, 2010). Further, it is important to understand the impact of the acculturation change in immigrants’ lives, including, language use and preference, communication style, social affiliation, as well as cultural identity,

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<sup>2</sup> Two of the most often used unidimensional indicators of Hispanic acculturation are generational level, or the generation in which the individual or his/her parent(s) immigrated to the United States (Arbona, 1995; Marin & Marin, 1991; Marin & Gamba, 2003; Phinney & Flores, 2002) and language spoken at home by bilingual individuals (Brown, 2002).

pride, knowledge, beliefs and values (Zane & Mak, 2003). For Hispanics in particular, markers of acculturation and enculturation processes include, but are not limited to, language use, social connections, cultural practices, and identification with cultural or ethnic labels (Quintana & Scull, 2009).

### **Acculturation Strategies**

An understanding of the consequences of acculturative change in immigrants' lives includes several considerations, including the changes that take place during the acculturation process, how individuals acculturate, and as a result of this experience, how well they adapt psychologically and socioculturally (Sam & Berry, 2010). This process can be conceptualized by John Berry's (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002; Berry, 2003) two-dimensional model of acculturation that considers how acculturating individuals can change along two dimensions: the degree of retention of one's own ethnic heritage, culture and identity, as well as the degree of involvement in the new society.

In accordance with the model, the intersection of these two dimensions creates four possible acculturation strategies, namely, assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilated or separated individuals identify with one culture (i.e., mainstream or ethnic culture respectively), while marginalized individuals identify with neither culture, and integrated individuals identify with both cultures. Research has shown that the marginalization strategy is least adaptive and the integration strategy is the most preferred and adaptive (Berry et al., 2002; Berry, 2003; Phinney, 2003). Hispanics in the United States may adopt the integration strategy of acculturation as a way to simultaneously maintain the Hispanic culture in their lives while also being an important part of the American society (Hernandez et al., 2011).

### **Biculturalism**

The integration strategy of acculturation is often viewed as biculturalism (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012), which is defined as when “acculturating individuals integrate the behaviors, values, and identities pertaining to each of their two cultures” (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2012, p. 2). Consistent with the alternation model of acculturation advanced by LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993), it is speculated that bicultural individuals tend to be more well adjusted because they are able to integrate and navigate both cultures more competently (Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Leu, 2006; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012). For example, Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Benet-Martinez (2000) explain that bicultural individuals engage in “cultural frame switching” whereby they are able to shift between different culturally-based interpretive lenses in response to being primed with culture-specific cues.

Benet-Martinez and her colleagues (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005) have coined this process as “bicultural identity integration (BII)” and found that those who exhibit more culturally appropriate behaviors when primed with cultural cues (high BIIs) are more adaptive than those individuals who respond in culturally inappropriate ways (low BIIs). While both individuals who are high and low on BII endorse Berry’s acculturation strategy of integration in that they identify with both cultures, only those who are high on BII view them as overlapping and compatible bicultural identities, while those who are low on BII view them as distant and incompatible, which may lead to internal conflict (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). As such, these findings demonstrate that variations in BII (high vs. low) can impact the behavioral and cognitive functioning of bicultural individuals.

Difficulties adopting the integration strategy may be related to acculturation stressors, including, but not limited to, ethnic-related discrimination, language difficulties and cultural

isolation (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Furthermore, having to navigate the cultural divide due to conflicts in attitudes, behaviors and values of between one's ethnic identity and that of the majority group's values and norms may present potential problems in participation in two cultures (Phinney, 1990).

### **Acculturative Stressors**

Researchers of cultural transition are especially concerned with how individuals cope, or fail to cope, with the acculturation process (Ryder et al., 2000). An important consideration in the acculturation process is the variability among individuals in the degree of stress experiences, coping abilities, and outcomes of the acculturation experience (Lara et al., 2012). Specifically, acculturative stress is often viewed as an important mediator between the acculturation-enculturation process and positive well-being for ethnic minorities (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Harris Bond, 2008; Yoon et al., 2012), especially Hispanics (Smart & Smart, 1995).

Acculturation stress is a negative reaction or reduction in physical and psychological health due to the changes rooted in the experience of acculturation (Berry, 2003) and is associated with negative outcomes (Wang, Schwartz, & Zamboanga, 2010) especially in the area of psychological adjustment and adaption (Chen et al., 2008). Berry et al. (2002) explain that the source of the difficulty lies in the interaction between the two cultures rather than one culture. However, it may be due to problems emanating from the dominant culture (e.g. prejudice and discrimination) or the non-dominant culture (e.g., lack of resources and education) or combination or interaction of the two cultures (e.g., communication difficulties).

Smart and Smart (1995) observe how acculturative stress often accompanies the acculturation process for Hispanics because of their unique cultural and racioethnic characteristics. It also tends to have a life-long duration and has a pervasive and intense

influence on Hispanics' psychological adjustment, physical health, decision-making abilities, and occupational functioning. The greater level of acculturative stress, the more difficult and less likely an individual will develop the skills or accumulate the resources that are necessary for effective adaptation, including optimal career performance. This suggests that for Hispanics, the acculturation process may contribute to significant stressors that can result in negative career outcomes.

### **Predictors of Acculturative Stress**

Acculturative stress is associated with multiple predictors, including, but not limited to, perceived discrimination (Berry et al., 2002; Berry, 2003; Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; Trimble, 2003; Yoon et al., 2012), linguistic difficulties (Finch & Vega, 2003; Miranda & Matheny, 2000), cultural and social isolation for acculturating individuals (Chen et al., 2008; Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012) and conflicts in attitudes, behaviors and values between one's ethnic identity and that of the majority group (Phinney, 1990). For example, acculturating individuals may encounter experiences of explicit and implicit bias and stereotyping from members of their host culture, face difficulties learning or speaking a new language, struggle to conform to the different values and expectations of the dominant culture of their workplaces or even making social connections with those who do not share their cultural values or traditions. As such, these acculturation stressors may pose potential risk factors that may contribute to a suboptimal adaptation response for Hispanics (Smart & Smart, 1995).

### **Perceived Discrimination**

As primary acculturative stressor, discrimination and prejudice on the basis of race/ethnicity against Hispanics in the United States, is well documented and continues to exist

(Markert, 2010; Meyer, 2003; Negi, 2012; Sanchez & Brock, 1996). In fact, in a study by the Pew Hispanic Center (2007), Hispanics indicated that perceived discrimination is a significant and growing problem that is hindering their success in the United States.

One factor in discrimination of ethnic minorities is visible or highly identifiable racial or phenotypical differences (Phinney, 2003). Non-white people in the United States are often labeled as "colored," and subsequently devalued and distanced. As such, lighter-skinned Hispanics tend to have a different acculturative experience because they do not necessarily face the labeling and discrimination associated with skin color (Smart & Smart, 1995). This is consistent with other research that demonstrates how prejudice associated with skin-color preference negatively impacts the well-being and life chances for Hispanic women (Montalvo, 2004). However, while some members of an ethnic group, especially Hispanics, may not carry the stereotypical physical characteristics of their ethnic group, they may still experience negative ethnic-based treatment and prejudice based on their accents, languages, names, among other ethnic markers (Bergman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & Chalkley, 2008; Mundra et al., 2003).

### **English Language Difficulties**

Lower levels of English language acquisition and proficiency are also associated with acculturative stress for Hispanics. Furthermore, English language difficulties are one of the most significant sources of perceived discrimination for Hispanics in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007). As explained by Miranda and Umhoefer (1998), the acquisition of a second language is an essential part of the acculturation process and, as such, the degree of language proficiency is determined by the extent to which a learner acculturates to the language of the host culture. Difficulties in the development of the host language may arise when there is significant social and psychological distance toward the target language and its speakers. As such,

individuals who are separated or marginalized (Berry, 2003) or who view their cultures as different or conflicting (low BII) (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005) may have more difficulties with English language acquisition. There is some support for this assertion in a study of Asian immigrants in Hong Kong that found evidence that one's bilingual competence, as well as perceiving one's cultural identities as integrated, is associated with more beneficial psychological outcomes (Chen et al., 2008).

One of the problems with limited English language fluency in the United States is that it inhibits effective functioning in important life domains, including employment (Organista and Kurasaki, 2003). In particular, difficulties in second-culture language skills may negatively affect their work performance (Chen et al., 2008). However, even for Hispanics who are English language proficient, the presence of a non-majority accent may contribute to perceptions of lowered aptitude, intelligence, and social status, and subsequently an individual's employability (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). This is reflected in a study of Latin American MBAs in Canada that found instances of subtle discrimination in employment based on accents even for those with high levels of English language proficiency (Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2010).

### **Cultural and Social Isolation**

Similar to perceived discrimination and English language difficulties, experiencing cultural and social isolation is related to psychological distress in Hispanic immigrants (Negi, 2012). Given their collectivist orientation, one of the most significant aspects of acculturative stress for Hispanics is the loss of social support and family ties, which may result in a loss of self-esteem and sense of belonging (Smart & Smart, 1995). As such, we argue that the acculturation experience may also contribute to a sense of isolation and alienation for Hispanics within their organizations, especially those who adopt a marginalization acculturation strategy.

There is some research that has examined the experience of cultural and social isolation of Hispanics in the workplaces as well. Cruz and her colleagues (Cruz & Molina, 2010; Cruz et al., 2010) have documented how given the dearth of Hispanic women in the legal profession, many are misidentified as non-attorneys, and feel a sense of invisibility, isolation, and alienation from their co-workers and peers. As one of the few Hispanic women in their workplaces, many also become tokenized, which further contributes to the sense of isolation they feel and places an enormous burden on them to be the representative for other Hispanics, or even for all people of color within their workplaces. As Kanter (1993) profoundly warns, the burdens of tokenism may have significant organizational implications for those who serve as symbols of their category including psychosocial difficulties, stress, frustration, poor self-image, unsatisfactory social relationships and feelings of insecurity, which have significant organizational implications. Furthermore, feelings of isolation and discrimination are expected to result in feelings of violated psychological contracts between Hispanic professionals and their organizations (Blancero et al., 2007).

### **Navigating the Cultural Divide**

Individuals who participate in two cultures often maintain separate and sometimes conflicting identities (Phinney, 1990). This can serve as a significant acculturative stressor due to the need to constantly navigate the significant cultural divide between their heritage and mainstream worlds, whose values, norms and behaviors are often incongruent. It should be noted, that while these individuals may pursue an integration strategy of acculturation (Berry, 2003), consistent with past arguments on bicultural identity integration, we believe that the internal conflict and difficulties may be rooted in their perception that these cultures are distant

and incompatible (low BII) rather than overlapping or compatible (high BII) (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

Flores, Berkel et al. (2006) argue that the tension and stress associated with the conflicting expectations associated with different cultural and mainstream values, traditions, and beliefs can feel overwhelming, consume unnecessary emotional energy, and impede career performance. There is some research on Hispanic women in the legal profession that illustrates this notion. Specifically, Cruz and Molina (2010) found that many Hispanic women attorneys struggle to find an appropriate identity to balance their own cultural value of *marianismo* by demonstrating humility and communicating in a nonaggressive and communal style with the simultaneous need to promote and assert themselves in their competitive and agentic legal workplaces. Many faced a double-bind of either being perceived as less competent and lacking self-confidence on the one hand, or being viewed as too aggressive or as a "fiery Latina" on the other. Negotiating a compromise between these two extreme perceptions of themselves proved to be an ongoing struggle for many. While this is a critical survival skill to cope and survive in their workplaces, the need to constantly vacillate between these two distinct worlds can be difficult, exhausting, and isolating (Vera & de los Santos, 2005).

### **Role of Acculturation Stressors and Hispanic Career Success**

We believe the acculturation experience is unique for Hispanics and may result in additional challenges for them in their workplace and their careers. In that regard, we propose that for many, aspects of the acculturation experience, including, but not limited to, perceived discrimination (Berry et al., 2002; Berry, 2003; Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; Trimble, 2003; Yoon et al., 2012), linguistic difficulties (Finch & Vega, 2003; Miranda & Matheny, 2000), cultural and social isolation (Chen et al., 2008; Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002;

Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012), as well as difficulties navigating the cultural divide of their workplaces (Cruz & Molina, 2010; Flores, Berkel et al., 2006; Garcia-Lopez & Segura, 2008) may result in acculturative stress. As such, we posit that this heightened level of stress will directly and negatively impact objective and subjective career success due to the psychological maladaptation and suboptimal functioning (Chen et al., 2008; Smart & Smart, 1995) in many of their life domains, including their work-roles.

*Proposition 1:* Acculturation stressors are predicted to decrease levels of both objective and subjective career success for Hispanics in terms of compensation, number of promotions, and positional levels, as well as perceived career success, career satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

Acculturation stressors including perceived discrimination may also result in both structural and attitudinal barriers that disadvantage Hispanics in their career advancement due to violations of contest-mobility arguments of an equitable meritocracy (Turner, 1960). Additionally, difficulties with English language skills negatively affect work performance (Chen et al., 2008; Organista & Kurasaki, 2003), which is a form of human capital. Further, cultural and social isolation may contribute to experiences of alienation, tokenism, and outsider status that distance Hispanics from their peers, mentors, and other influential networks that are critical to their advancement and satisfaction in their careers (Mundra et al., 2003). As such, we propose that these acculturation stressors will moderate the role of human capital and organizational sponsorship variables on Hispanics' objective and subjective career success such that those who encounter these stressors will be negatively impacted in their objective career success due to limitations in human capital and organizational sponsorship. They will also contribute to lower levels of subjective career success due to limitations in organizational sponsorship.

*Proposition 2:* Acculturation stressors will moderate the relationship between human capital and objective career success, and will decrease levels of objective career success.

Likewise, acculturation stressors will moderate the relationship between organizational sponsorship and both objective and subjective career success and will decrease levels of both objective and subjective career success.

### **Acculturation Supports**

We have illustrated how the acculturation process may contribute to stressors that negatively impact the lives and careers of Hispanics in the United States; however, we counter that Hispanics who adopt adaptive acculturation strategies, or what we refer to as “acculturation supports,” including a bicultural and ethnic identity, English language proficiency, and social connections with members of both mainstream and heritage groups, will contribute to positive career-related outcomes and also buffer many of the negative effects of these and other acculturation stressors on their career success.

#### **Bicultural Identity**

Biculturalism is one of the key pillars of successful acculturation, which implies the ability to function in a manner that is congruent with the values, beliefs, customs, behaviors, and language of both the ethnic and host culture, (Padilla & Perez, 2003). As such, adopting a bicultural identity is associated with favorable psychosocial outcomes such as greater well-being, adaption, and adjustment (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 2003; Chen et al., 2008; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010), as well as sociocultural adjustment which “may include academic achievement, career success, and social skills” (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012 p. 3).

Bicultural individuals are also believed to outperform monocultural peers in academic and vocational goals (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Furthermore, since variations in an individuals’ BII influence their behavioral and cognitive functioning (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), it is argued that those who view their heritage and host cultures as compatible and overlapping (high

BII) rather than distant and incompatible (low BII) are better able to navigate the cultural divide and therefore adapt to and succeed in the dominant culture of their workplaces.

Much of the existing research to date connecting biculturalism and actual career success has been speculative; however, there is some support for its relationship to objective career success. In a study of American MBA students who have lived abroad, Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux (2012) found that, due to enhanced “integrative complexity,” individuals living abroad who identified with both host and home cultures demonstrated higher levels of creativity and professional success in terms of experiencing higher promotion rates and more positive reputations as compared to those MBA students who identified with only one culture. In this way, it is suggested that the increased skills and competence associated with biculturalism may increase their human capital, which, as previously discussed, is a key predictor of objective career success.

While benefits of maintaining a bicultural identity and objective career success are more apparent, it may be also be related to subjective dimensions of career success because of the affective benefits associated with higher levels of psychological and sociocultural health, adjustment and well-being (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 2003; Chen et al., 2008; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2010). As such, the benefits accrued from more favorable adjustment and psychological well-being will undoubtedly contribute to higher levels of subjective career success as it relates to their career-related satisfaction and commitment.

### **English Language Proficiency**

English language proficiency can be viewed as an important component of one’s bicultural competence, especially for Hispanics. It has been linked to aspects of objective career

success in some samples, especially for those who are more highly educated. Specifically, Mundra et al. (2003) found that fluency in English, as well as educational level, were the most important predictors of career advancement for Hispanics in professional and managerial roles. Furthermore, a recent study of employed Asian Americans found evidence that their degree of English language proficiency was associated with greater income levels, but only for those who attended college (Saad, Sue, Zane, & Cho, 2012).

### **Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity, which is a key component of biculturalism, may also serve as an important acculturation support for Hispanics who encounter certain acculturation stressors, especially with respect to their subjective career success. One key finding is that when racioethnic minorities, including Hispanics, encounter ethnic-related stressors, they often adhere more strongly to their ethnic identity (Berry et al., 2002; Berry, 2003; Smart & Smart, 1995). As such, the positive feelings associated with affiliation to an ethnic group increase self-concept and help to counter the negative consequences of perceived discrimination (Phinney, 2003).

Maintaining a strong ethnic identity is of critical importance to the self-concept and psychological functioning of ethnic group members, especially those who may be disparaged, discriminated against, or who may struggle to maintain their own customs and traditions (Phinney, 1990). Higher ethnic identity has been empirically linked with positive outcomes including higher well-being and self-esteem (Phinney, 2003), reductions in work-family conflict on job satisfaction (DelCampo et al., 2010), as well as career-related attributes (Combs, Milosevic, Jeung, & Griffith, 2012).

Ethnic identity may also moderate potential negative outcomes associated with certain acculturation stressors (i.e., perceived discrimination) and objective career success. For

example, Hispanics with a strong ethnic identity who experience perceived discrimination often use cognitive buffers or blinders to cope with its negative effects (Hakak et al., 2010).

Furthermore, ethnic identity commitment has been found to attenuate experiences of covert discrimination and Hispanic psychological distress (Torres et al., 2011) and also appears to give Hispanics more confidence to counteract the negative outcomes of perceived discrimination (Ojeda et al., 2012).

### **Social Connections**

Related to the benefits of an integrated acculturation strategy (Berry et al., 2002; Berry, 2003; Phinney, 2003), Hispanics' career success can also benefit from maintaining social connectedness with both mainstream society and their ethnic communities and families. In the case of objective career success, while research has found that ethnic identity may negatively impact a Hispanics' career advancement due to their more dense and less widely dispersed network structures (DelCampo, Van Buren, & Blancero, 2007), we argue here that by also establishing more widespread social ties with majority individuals, including professional colleagues inside and outside their organizations, can foster objective career success by providing them with the mentoring and developmental opportunities that facilitate their career mobility. In fact, research has found that Hispanics believe that establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal connections, in particular networking and relationship building, are an essential aspect of their successful cultural navigation (Torres et al., 2012).

In terms of subjective career success, maintaining close ties with their Hispanic families and communities can serve as a source of social affiliation, support, and well-being. For example, Wang, et al. (2010) found that for individuals in an ethnic enclave, support received from the heritage culture community contributed to enhanced feelings of self-worth.

### **Role of Acculturation Supports and Hispanic Career Success**

We advance the notion that many Hispanics are well adapted and thrive as a result of their acculturation experiences due to the positive influence of acculturation supports. In particular, we argue that many of these supports, including maintaining a compatible and overlapping bicultural identity, strong ethnic identity, and social connectedness to both mainstream and ethnic communities and families will serve as protective factors and also provide positive career-related resources as a result of the acculturation process. Specifically, a bicultural identity incorporates bicultural comfort, competence, and linguistic proficiency, which may counteract certain negative career outcomes associated with acculturation stressors. This provides the acculturating individual with greater well-being, adaptation, and social and psychological adjustment (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 2003; Chen et al., 2008; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2010)

Likewise, a strong ethnic identity may attenuate the negative effects of perceived discrimination, especially as it relates to their career satisfaction (Hakak et al., 2010; Ojeda et al., 2012; Torres et al., 2011) Furthermore, Hispanics who maintain strong networks with both their ethnic and mainstream communities are less likely to encounter the stress of isolation and sense of alienation many experience as racioethnic minorities in their organizations. Taken together, we propose that acculturation supports, including having a strong bicultural and ethnic identity, as well as maintaining social connectedness will moderate the negative effects of the acculturation stressors on both objective and subjective career success.

*Proposition 3:* Acculturation supports will moderate the relationship between acculturation stressors and objective career success and will increase levels of objective career success. Likewise, in the relationship between acculturation stressors and subjective career success, acculturation supports will act as a moderator and will increase levels of subjective career success.

We argue that acculturation supports will also moderate the relationships between human capital variables and objective career success, as well as organizational sponsorship variables and objective and subjective career success. Bicultural individuals will experience higher levels of objective career success due to increases in human capital investments. Specifically, the skills associated with increased intercultural competence, (Torres, 2009) and integrative complexity and creativity (Tadmor et al., 2012), as well as linguistic proficiency (Chen et al., 2008) will increase levels of performance and productivity. Consistent with human capital arguments, increased productivity and human capital investments will, in turn, be rewarded in the form of higher organizational income and status.

In addition to its contribution to Hispanics' human capital, we propose that bicultural individuals are more likely to receive organizational sponsorship (i.e., greater access to influential mentors and developmental networks) because their enhanced bicultural competence and social skills (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Chen et al., 2008; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012 p. 3) will help them to better navigate the cultural divide between the dominant cultures of their workplaces and their culture of origin. As such, increased organizational sponsorship will result in higher levels of both objective and subjective career success.

*Proposition 4:* Acculturation supports will moderate the relationship between human capital and objective career success, such that acculturation supports, especially a bicultural identity, will increase levels of objective career success. Likewise, acculturation supports will moderate the relationship between organizational sponsorship and both objective and subjective career success, such that acculturation supports, including a bicultural identity, will increase levels of both objective and subjective career success.

Additionally, we acknowledge that acculturation supports may positively influence both objective and subjective career success directly. We propose that biculturalism will be positively associated with both objective and subjective career success due to instrumental and

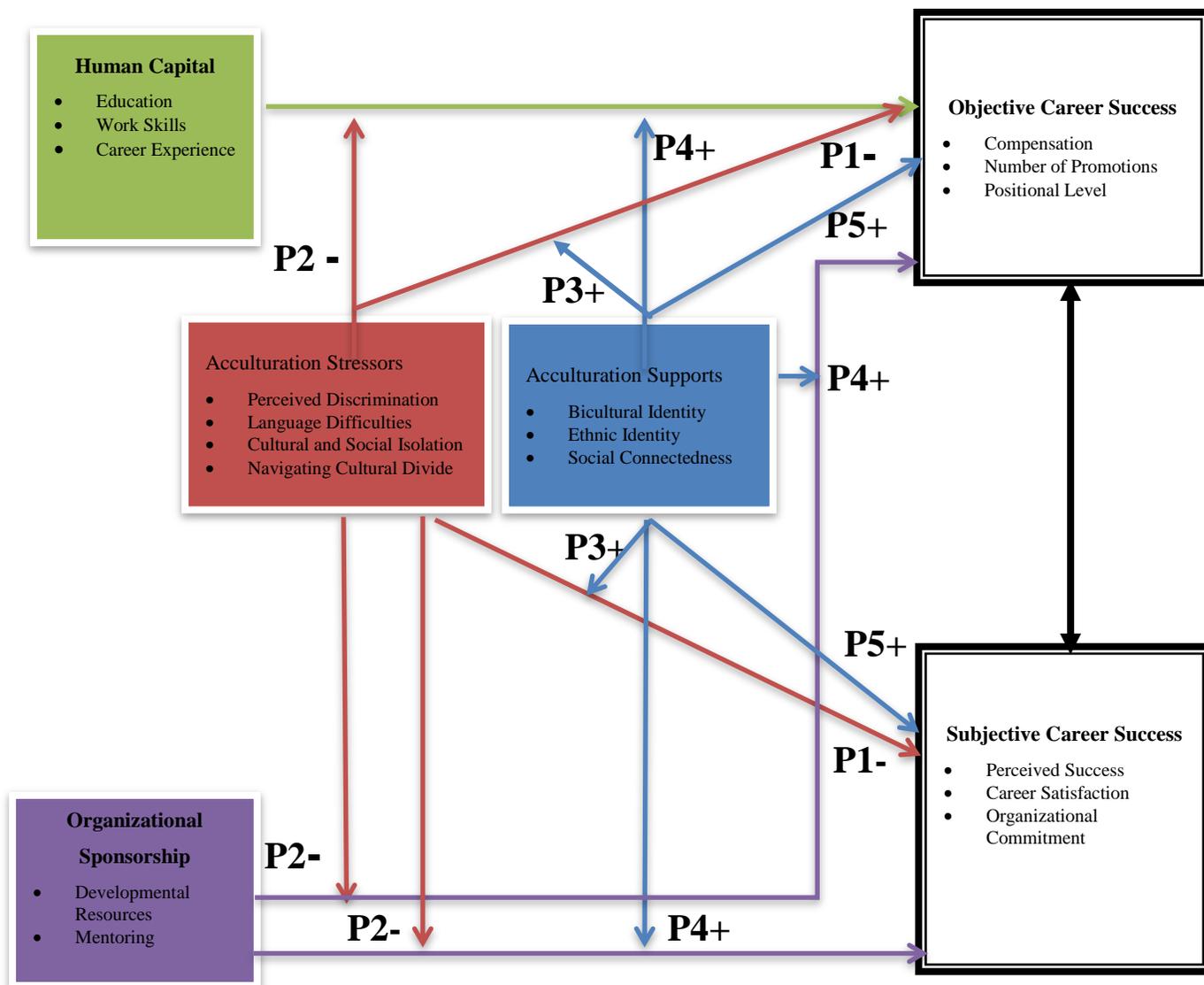
affective benefits associated with higher levels of psychological and sociocultural health, adjustment and well-being overall (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 2003; Chen et al., 2008; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2010). These benefits accrued from increased sociocultural adjustment and psychological well-being will undoubtedly contribute to higher levels of career-related performance, adaption, satisfaction and commitment.

Another acculturation support, ethnic identity, is predicted to result in higher levels of subjective career success. In this way, Hispanics who closely identify with their culture of origin, including its values, behaviors, and norms, are hypothesized to also experience higher levels of subjective career success, especially career satisfaction and organizational commitment, due to the positive impact of this cultural variable on their well-being and adjustment (Phinney, 2003).

Maintaining close social connections with both ethnic and mainstream members may also support Hispanics career success directly. Social ties with majority members and networks can provide Hispanics with greater access to a varied pool of potential mentors and developmental relationships that are often lack, but critical to their career advancement and objective career success. Furthermore, maintaining relationships with individuals from their Hispanic communities and families may provide the psychosocial support and comfort that can ease their cultural transition and contribute to enhanced career satisfaction and commitment.

**Proposition 5:** Acculturation supports, including a bicultural and ethnic identity, as well as social connectedness, will increase levels of both objective and subjective career success.

Figure 1: The role of Acculturation in Hispanics' Career Success



## Conclusion

The acculturation experience is a complex and understudied phenomenon, especially as it relates to the lives and careers of Hispanics in the United States. While much of the research conducted to date has considered the effects of acculturation on physical and psychosocial health outcomes for this population, here we focus on the role of acculturation as it relates to the career success and satisfaction of Hispanics in the United States.

Fundamentally, this paper argues that while many Hispanics in this country face acculturative stressors in their lives and careers, we propose that developing and maintaining a bicultural identity orientation, which encompasses a strong ethnic identity, English language proficiency, and social connectedness, is a unique and important acculturative support necessary for effective occupational functioning, advancement, and well-being. Many Hispanics living and working in the United States consider themselves bicultural; however, oftentimes they find themselves developing a hybrid identity as a way to navigate the cultural divide between Corporate American workplace norms and values with those of their cultural heritage, which can sometimes be in opposition. Furthermore, this type of segregated identity may result in cultural dissonance whereby the individual may experience “conflict between one’s own sense of culture and what others expect” (Torres, 2003, p. 540).

One important implication for Hispanic individuals is that a true bicultural identity orientation requires a self-concept that authentically integrates one’s ethnic and mainstream identities in a compatible and mutually beneficial way. For example, in their framework of Hispanic identity orientations, Gallegos and Ferdman (2007) describe those who fully integrate their Hispanic identity with their other social identities as “Latino-Integrated” individuals. These Hispanics are comfortable with and inclusive of their multidimensional identity, which reflects a

“both/and” rather than an “either/or” philosophy. Instead of viewing themselves more narrowly as either “Hispanic” or “not Hispanic,” those who are truly bicultural view their social identity through a wider and more dynamic lens.

While developing and maintaining a bicultural identity orientation can help Hispanic professionals as they navigate their acculturation experience, organizations should also take steps to eliminate potential acculturative stressors within their workplaces. In particular, employers can reduce Hispanic professionals’ perceptions of ethnic discrimination by valuing and fostering a more diverse organizational culture and workforce composition (Flores, Navarro et al., 2006; Muñiz, 2009). Furthermore, as an implicit form is ethnic discrimination, unexamined biases within the workplace can lead to unfair assumptions and judgments about Hispanic professionals’ performance and capacity. Subsequently, this can have a cumulative negative effect over time on their advancement potential.

To counteract this, organizational leaders must be made aware of how implicit biases and stereotypes of Hispanics can negatively impact their careers, and examine each element of the organization’s culture to identify patterns that inhibit their full participation and ability to succeed. Other organizational members must also be given an opportunity to explore their own personal stereotypes and biases toward Hispanics, as well as other minority groups through dialogues with both individuals and focus groups to gain a better understanding of this issue.

Organizational leaders can also increase satisfaction levels of Hispanic employees by empowering them and making them feel truly valued in the organization. This can be accomplished through critical evaluation and modification of institutionalized structures, policies, and practices that obscure diversity goals, as well as implementing cultural awareness

and sensitivity programs that bring attention to the unique values and needs of a more diverse employee population.

Supporting Hispanic professionals in achieving true career success requires a unique perspective that incorporates alternative forms of career success that are more subjective in nature and focus attention on family as well as work factors. While career success in the United States is often conceptualized in objective terms, which equates status and salary to achievement, Hispanic professionals' cultural identity and values may influence their definition of success differently. This realization suggests that, for Hispanic professionals to perceive themselves as truly successful, satisfied, and therefore committed to their careers, they must be able to integrate aspects of their ethnic identity and cultural values into their professional lives as well. To that end, Hall's (2004) concept of the protean career, in which the main success criteria are subjective in nature and that incorporates aspects of the individual's identity and values may be a more appropriate framework for conceptualizing the career success of Hispanics in the workplace.

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