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Traversing Two Worlds: Influences Upon Career Perspectives of Mexican-American Music Education Majors

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Abstract

The present study examines the career pathways of Mexican-American music majors. Participants included 42 (17 female, 25 male) music majors enrolled at a Hispanic-Serving Institution in South Texas. The study focused on identifying relations among students' levels of acculturation and career goals. Students' cultural behavior, career self-efficacy, extrinsic and intrinsic work values, motivation, and social bonding were measured via standardized questionnaires. Results indicate that a greater degree of adhering to both traditional and American culture predict higher career outcomes, including culture and gender interactions.

Keywords

Mexican-American, acculturation, music majors, career self-efficacy

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Background

For young people embarking on their undergraduate education, choice of a major may be among the most important decisions. Students choose college majors for a number of reasons such as preparation, perceived ability or competence (Ma, 2009; Riza & Heller, 2015), as well as personality characteristics and family support (Astin, 1993). Music majors report being influenced by role models and family influences (Rickels et al., 2010) as well as an intrinsic enjoyment of music (Parkes & Jones, 2011; 2012). Perceived musical ability also might contribute to intrinsic motivation for music majors (Riza & Heller, 2015). For Mexican-American students, influences such as language and culture also play a large role in students' post-secondary choices (Tornatsky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). In this study, we examine the career pathways of predominantly bilingual Mexican-American music majors. As Mexican-American students become more prevalent in United States (US) institutions of higher education (Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2006), there is an increasing need to investigate how the unique experiences of these students relate to career choices and persistence toward degrees.

In Texas, as across the country, music teacher recruitment continues to be important. Some educators suggest that K-12 school music participation might be increasing (Lautzenheiser, 2001) and that a music teacher shortage might exist in many areas (Hill, 2003). Given these findings and the increase in Hispanic students across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), higher education professionals could benefit from knowledge regarding music teacher career choice that might help attract and retain well-educated, bilingual Hispanic music teachers in American schools. Thus, we examine career motivation, career self-efficacy, and cultural

orientation in an effort to further understand the role of language and culture in the career outlooks of Mexican-American music education majors. Participants were of Mexican descent, self-identifying as “Mexican-American,” and so hereafter are referred to as such.

Career Motivation

Although the choice to pursue music education as a major does not guarantee that students will seek employment in that field, it is a major which likely leads to a career. From the 1960s and 70s, teaching has been considered a stable career with job security ([Haubrich, 1960](#); [Wright, 1977](#)). In studies of students in education majors, researchers have found that the majority did plan to teach at least 5 years ([West & Brousseau, 1987](#); [Zimpher, 1989](#)). These studies and others, such as Rickels et al. (2010), suggest that it is appropriate to examine the career outlooks of undergraduate students.

Career Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, defined as a person's belief in his/her ability to succeed in a particular situation, has been shown to relate to career choice. Students' perceptions of their own abilities, including their musical and teaching abilities, play an important role in motivation toward their major and career choice (Bergee & Grashel, 2002; Parkes, 2007). Jones and Parkes (2010) found that one factor related to music education majors' decisions to teach music was their identification with perceived music teaching talent. Beliefs about teaching efficacy, defined as a teacher's expectation that they can positively influence student learning (Wagoner, 2011), also positively relate to career persistence and commitment and can be a predictor of career longevity (Erwan, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). These factors are especially important to investigate, as national estimates suggest that career burn-out can lead music teachers toward choosing alternate careers (Hancock, 2009). Efficacy beliefs are thought to develop slowly during courses in an undergraduate major and even into the first years of teaching. Also, they have been found to be future-oriented, suggesting that undergraduate education majors look ahead toward a career in teaching (Gavin, 2012; Pritchard, 2017; Woolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Cultural Orientation

Mexican-American music majors may have unique features and experiences that affect career pursuits, self-efficacy, and persistence. For example, Mexican-American students have strong connections to family—referred to as *familism*—which manifests itself in community cohesiveness, obedience within the family, respect for adults, and traditional gender roles (Villanueva et al., 2008) and a tendency toward religiosity, particularly Catholicism (Pew Research Center, 2014). Researchers have found evidence that these values affect Mexican-American college students' choices and subsequent degrees of success. For example, in a study of eight Mexican-American women, Rosas and Hamrick (2002) found that family members played key roles in providing encouraging messages of expectations for college attendance and that participants strongly considered how their selection of major would strengthen their abilities to carry out their obligations to family and community. Morgan Consoli, Llamas, and Consol (2016) also found that cultural values played a role in Mexican-American college students' lives: thriving among these students was positively correlated with resilience, family support, respect, and religion. Thus, for Mexican-American students, influences such as family and cultural background should be examined as key influences on post-secondary choices.

In examining cultural influences, it is important to consider how much the individual still adheres to traditional values. The process by which immigrants acclimate to the predominant culture of their new community is known as *acculturation*. Acculturation begins when two or more different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with each other, resulting in subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). Among Mexican-American students, acculturation can be recognized as youth begin to acquire behaviors, attitudes, values, and other cultural elements of the dominant U.S. culture (Cabassa 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010). By contrast, *enculturation* is the degree to which people adhere to their own culture (Aguayo, Herman, Ojeda & Flores, 2011). Enculturation is the process by which Mexican-American youth learn and engage in the practices, values, and identifications of their Mexican-American culture (Schwartz et al., 2010). Although at one time the processes of acculturation and enculturation were thought to be mutually exclusive,

researchers now suggest that Mexican-American youth can acculturate and enculturate simultaneously (Cabassa, 2003).

Some gender differences among Mexican-American attitudes toward family and career roles have also been documented. For example, Gowan and Trevino (1998) found that males were significantly more likely to hold traditional gender role values (e.g., about women in the workplace and parental responsibilities for child care). Thus, when exploring cultural influences, gender is an important consideration, and students' acculturation and enculturation may interact accordingly (Schwartz et al., 2010). Understanding how cultural factors affect Mexican-American music majors could aid in the advisement and support of students, and guide those seeking to use culturally relevant practices specific to this population.

In the present study, we investigated Mexican-American college students who chose music as a major at an American university to begin to determine the role of cultural influences (both American and Mexican) on these students' career outlooks. We explored factors important in predicting students' feelings of career success. Specifically, we addressed the following questions:

1. What factors influence Mexican-American students' choice of music as a career?
2. How does students' cultural background relate to career decision self-efficacy?
3. Do these effects differ by gender? Do gender by cultural interaction effects exist?

Method

Participants and Recruitment

Students enrolled in music courses at a large Mexican-American-serving institution, located in South Texas, were recruited to complete an online survey. They were offered incentives such as extra credit or recital lab attendance credit. There were 73 participants that initiated the survey, but only complete cases of those who met the cultural group criteria were included in final participant counts. Thus, final participants included 54 (26 female, 28 male) music majors. Most were upperclassmen (18 seniors and 22 juniors), with some (11) sophomores and (3) freshmen. All (100%) self-identified as Mexican-American and 72% as bilingual in Spanish and English.

Design and Procedures

An online survey was created and distributed using the survey software *Qualtrics*. The study was correlational by design and focused on identifying the nature of relationship(s) among cultural behavior, career self-efficacy, motivation, and values.

Measures

Demographics. We obtained basic demographic (e.g., age, sex, ethnicity) and student classification (e.g., major, year in school) information.

Cultural behavior. We utilized the Acculturation Rating Scale for MexicanAmericans II (ARSMA-II) by Cuéllar et al. (1995), which consists of a) the Mexican-Orientation Scale (MOS), a measure of traditional culture adherence, and b) the Anglo Orientation Scale (AOS), a measure of adoption of American culture. The original scale has a test-retest reliability of .96, which was .76 in the present study. MOS and AOS scores used to derive acculturation typologies: Traditional, High Integrated Bicultural, Low Integrated Bicultural, and Assimilated, using cut-points based on standardized procedures as describe in the ARSMA-II. Participants who did not clearly fall into one or another of the four acculturative typologies were excluded from analyses. We computed a biculturalism score, derived from scores on the ARSMA-II items, to provide a value of participants' degree of biculturalism, with more positive scores reflecting a greater degree of adherence to both cultures.

Career Decision Self-Efficacy. We administered the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSE-SF; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996; Betz & Taylor, 2001), a 25-question measure using 5-point Likert-type responses (from 1 indicating no confidence at all, to 5 indicating complete confidence) to study career self-efficacy beliefs. The CDSE-SF includes questions such as how much confidence one has that one can "make a plan of goals for the next five years," and "determine what [your] ideal job would be." The scale validity was original reported to be greater than .80; .94 and .87 for other similar studies (Betz, Hammond, & Multon, 2005); the current study showed a validity score with a Cronbach's alpha of .94.

Career Motivation. The Career Motivation subscale (Bradley, Maschi, O'Brien, Morgen, &

Ward, 2012) includes 19 items that assess career motivations of individuals entering the social work field. It asks participants to rate (from 1-10) how strongly they agree with statements such as "I knew someone in the field," "A family member encouraged me," and "I enjoy helping people." Cronbach's alpha for the original scale was .83, and in the current study, alpha was .70.

Career Maturity Inventory. The Career Maturity Inventory Form C (CMI Form C), developed by Savickas and Porfeli (2011) from the preexisting CMI measure of vocational development, was restructured to measure career choice readiness, or career maturity. It is a 24-item questionnaire where participants agree or disagree with statements such as, "Everyone seems to tell me something different; as a result, I don't know what kind of work to choose," and "I am having difficulty in preparing myself for the work that I want to do." The Cronbach's alpha for the composite scale measuring degree of career choice readiness was .70.

Boundaryless and Protean Career Attitudes. Two scales measured participants' attitudes about future career as 1) offering flexibility and freedom (Boundaryless), and 2) offering mobility (i.e., Protean). The Boundaryless Career Attitudes Scale (Briscoe & Hall, 2006) is a 13-item measure formed by two 5-point Likert-type scales with answer choices ranging from "too little or no intent," to "a great extent." Items were re-worded to be applicable towards music majors. For the original scales, the reliability coefficient was .81 and for the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .75. The Protean Career Attitudes Scale included 14-items, with original reliability of .81, and with Cronbach's alpha of .84 for the present study.

Valuing of Education. The Value of Education Scale (VOE; Battle & Wigfield, 2003) is a 51-item, 5-point Likert-type response measure of the degree of "liking" or "enjoyment" of the pursuit of graduate school, attainment value, utility value, and the anticipated costs. The Cronbach's alpha for this composite scale was high, $\alpha = .93$.

Results

We conducted initial analyses to ensure that there was adequate variability across participant responses. Table 1 shows the range, means, and standard deviations for all variables by gender. We

centralized all variables to reduce multicollinearity. We then conducted analyses to address the three research questions.

Table 1. Range, means, and standard deviations for culture and career-related variables by gender.

Table 1.

Range, Means, and Standard Deviations for Culture and Career-related Variables by Gender

Variable	Female, <i>n</i> = 26			Male, <i>n</i> = 28		
	Range	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD
Biculturalism	-4.00-0.00	-2.50	1.14	-4.00-0.00	-1.98	1.38
Enculturation	1.00-4.00	2.26	.91	1.00-5.00	2.71	1.19
Acculturation	3.00-5.00	4.76	.47	3.00-5.00	4.60	.61
Career Decision Self-Efficacy	2.96-5.00	3.98	.59	2.72-5.00	3.81	.62
Career Motivation	4.94-8.13	6.31	.86	4.22-7.78	6.38	1.04
Career Maturity	1.00-1.61	1.29	.17	1.13-1.57	1.35	.13
Boundaryless Career Attitudes	1.83-4.17	3.24	.60	1.83-3.75	2.90	.50
Protean Career Attitudes	2.50-5.00	4.16	.54	3.07-4.86	4.11	.54
Valuing Education	1.92-4.84	3.16	.52	2.00-4.65	3.27	.60

To investigate factors that influence Mexican-American students' choice of music as a career, we examined the intercorrelations among the variables. Table 2 displays a correlation matrix of all variables that measured career influences.

Table 2. Intercorrelations among cultural and career-related variables.

Table 2.
Intercorrelations among Cultural and Career-related Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Biculturalism	-	.90**	-.58**	.04	.11	.02	.32*	-.08	.17
2. Enculturation		-	-.25	.17	.18	.00	.34*	.08	.30
3. Acculturation			-	.24	.29	-.01	-.15	.36*	.07
4. Career Decision Self-Efficacy				-	.72**	-.61**	.48**	.62**	.29
5. Career Motivation					-	-.33**	.40**	.52**	.27
6. Career Maturity						-	-.26	-.35*	-.04
7. Boundaryless Career Attitude							-	.27	-.05
8. Protean Career Attitude								-	.11
9. Valuing Education									-

N = 42; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

Anglo Orientation Scale scores positively related to Protean Career Attitudes scores ($r = .36$, $p < .05$), and Mexican Orientation scale correlated with boundaryless career attitudes ($r = .34$, $p < .05$). Career Decision Self Efficacy scores positively correlated with career motivation ($r = .72$, $p < .01$), boundaryless career attitudes ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), protean career attitudes ($r = .62$, $p < .01$), and inversely with career maturity ($r = -.61$, $p < .01$). Additionally, degree of biculturalism positively correlated with boundaryless career attitudes ($r = .32$, $p < .05$).

To address the question of whether Mexican-American music majors of differing cultural backgrounds differed in career decisions, we compared the means of groups of students who varied in acculturation level, as shown in Table 3. We conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) to compare effects of means of groups of students of similar acculturation levels on career decision self-efficacy, valuing education, career motivation, boundaryless career attitudes, and protean career attitudes, while holding career maturity constant. Results revealed significant main effects, Pillai's Trace = .62, $F(10, 70) = 3.17$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .31$. We also found significant effects for high-bicultural participants in career decision self-efficacy [$F(2, 38) = 4.38$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .19$], valuing education [$F(2, 38) = 3.67$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .16$], boundaryless career attitudes [$F(2, 38) = 3.62$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .16$], protean career attitudes [$F(2, 38) = 5.61$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .23$], and career motivation

[$F(2, 38) = 5.97, p < .01, \eta^2 = .24$]. Post-hoc analyses, using the Bonferroni correction, revealed that highly bicultural participants reported greater reports of valuing education ($M = .79$), career decision self-efficacy ($M = .71$), $p < .05$, protean career attitudes ($M = .66$), and career motivation ($M = 1.69$), $p < .01$, than low bicultural participants; additionally, we found higher boundaryless career attitudes for highly bicultural participants ($M = .51$) than for assimilated participants, although this difference not significant, $p < .06$. Assimilated participants also reported higher protean career attitudes ($M = .46$) than low bicultural participants, $p < .05$.

Table 2. MANCOVA adjusted means of career-related variables by culture groups.

Table 3.

MANCOVA Adjusted Means of Career-related Variables by Culture Groups

Variables	Low-Bicultural	High-Bicultural	Assimilated
Career Decision Self-Efficacy	-.26	.46*	.03
Career Motivation	-.95	.74*	-.07
Boundaryless Career Attitudes	.19	.31	-.20
Protean Career Attitudes	-.38	.28*	.08*
Valuing Education	-.28	.51*	-.02

$N = 42$; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

To examine how gender affected individuals of varying cultural backgrounds, we conducted a MANCOVA to examine the interaction effects between culture groups, gender, and career maturity on career decision self-efficacy, valuing education, career motivation, boundaryless career attitudes, and protean career attitudes. Overall, there was a statistically significant effect, Pillai's Trace = 1.73, $F(30, 140) = 2.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$. Significant differences between gender were found for career decision self-efficacy [$F(6, 28) = 8.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .64$], valuing education [$F(6, 28) = 3.02, p < .05, \eta^2 = .39$], career motivation [$F(6, 29) = 6.47, p < .001, \eta^2 = .58$], and protean career attitudes [$F(6, 28) = 2.51, p < .05, \eta^2 = .35$]. Post-hoc mean difference analyses, using the Bonferroni correction, revealed that males ($M = 1.02$) reported higher boundaryless career attitudes than female participants, and this difference was significant, $p < .05$.

Discussion

As Mexican-American students increasingly pursue higher education degrees, music majors among them, it is important to understand the factors that affect their academic and career paths. The present study has identified several factors that influence Mexican-American students' choice and persistence in music as a career.

We found that cultural background relates to student burnout, with more acculturated students less likely to report career burnout; similarly, students higher in Anglo orientation reportedly were more career motivated. These findings support previous studies, which indicate that acculturation to Anglo culture positively influences Latina/o students' success (Cavazos Vela, Johnson, Cavazos, Ikonomopoulos, & Gonzalez, 2014; Flores, Navarro, & DeWitz, 2008) and educational aspirations (Lopez, Ehly, & Garcia-Vasquez, 2002) in US schools. The acculturation process that takes place as a student participates in a course of music study at an American university (classes in English, traditional Western classical music focus, etc.) may also influence students' perceptions of career possibilities. In addition, these more Americanized students likely struggle less with language-learning issues and familiarity with Western music, leading to experiences of success in school in terms of good grades, performance opportunities, and the like. A number of the more "successful" students in the music department have also had the opportunity to work in the field while still in school—teaching private lessons and leading sectionals or serving as assistants for marching band activities, for example—forging important contacts in the local music education community. These contacts and feelings of familiarity in the working world then may lead to their perception of future success.

For many of these students, the pervasive pressure to "assimilate" into American culture (including prejudice and discrimination) undoubtedly plays an important role. Students' engagement in Mexican-American-influenced cultural practices might affect major decisions and perceptions of self-efficacy for the music education majors in this study. Due to the complicated relationship between the US and Mexico and their physical proximity, Mexican-Americans are

unsurprisingly affected by high rates of prejudice and discrimination (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Ongoing anti-immigrant policies may increase minority stress and discrimination experienced by Mexican-American college students, particularly immigrant students, which then plays a role in their academic outcomes. The participants in this study, mostly acculturated into mainstream American society, are advancing in their chosen major and do report high aspirations for obtaining a good job. They are considered success stories, on track to contribute to rising graduation rates for Mexican-American college students.

Findings also strengthen past calls by scholars to develop and implement initiatives aimed at increasing Latina/o students' knowledge of processes and landscapes of institutes of higher education, particularly first-generation college students (Aguayo, Herman, Ojeda, & Flores, 2011). It is especially important, then, that music educators and career counselors engage the families of low-acculturated students to discover how they can best encourage and support their child's pursuits. In this way, access to careers in music can be opened to students who might not have considered majoring in music, or perhaps not considered attending college at all. With the knowledge that less-acculturated Mexican-American students may be more likely to burn-out, advisers are encouraged to examine the educational barriers specific to these students' academic and professional success in music. Given that students' high value of education correlated positively with their career decision self-efficacy, programs that seek to build academic aspirations in music careers early are warranted. As more young Mexican-American children are encouraged to pursue music as a major, the field will see a rise in confident, persistent musicians with culturally unique contributions.

The present study also found gender differences in the effects of cultural background on career-related variables, favoring women with higher career maturity and biculturalism. These findings might be attributed to the still-evolving gender roles seen in recent decades, among all cultural groups. The Mexican-American culture has historically been known for traditional gender roles (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002). These students, shown in this study to be primarily acculturated into American mainstream society, are once again straddling two worlds. Female students are

increasingly encountering empowering messages in higher education— that they can compete on an even playing field with their male counterparts. At home, however, they may receive contradictory messages from family members and/or community elders, who may rely on women to perform household duties and a majority of the child-rearing. The current findings, then, can be seen as encouraging for college-age women with career aspirations. Additional research is needed to further explore the nature of cultural dissonance and how it is experienced by Mexican-American students of both genders, as well as students who identify as non-binary or LGBTQ.

More research on Mexican-American college students is warranted to determine whether they have different needs than college students from other cultural backgrounds. As we work to encourage students toward success, particularly at Mexican-American-serving institutions, we want to discover whether conventional methods of teaching and learning are acceptable or if new techniques should be pursued. As culturally-responsive teaching and learning models become more prevalent in music education, we hope to contribute to effective higher education practices that can benefit and empower all students.

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